

Halo, The Imperial War

by SpaceCowboy2013

Category: Halo, Star Wars

Language: English

Characters: Master Chief/John-117

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2012-12-03 08:17:09

Updated: 2013-09-06 21:17:04

Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:21:19

Rating: T

Chapters: 10

Words: 78,813

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Mankind's first contact is not what it had been expecting, and not with anyone or anything they were expecting. But never the less contact goes poorly for all and sends repercussions further than anyone could have imagined. Halo AU/Star Wars

1. Chapter 1

****All I have to say that its slightly AU, so sue me****

****Enjoy and review if you like.****

****And yes part of this chapter uses context from Fall of Reach.****

0600 Hours, November 2nd, 2525 (Military Calendar) / Epsilon Eridani System, Reach UNSC ****

Military Complex, planet Reach****

John wondered who had died. The Spartans had been called to muster in their dress uniforms only once before: funeral detail.

The Purple Heart awarded to him after his last mission glistened on his chest. He made sure it was polished to a high sheen. It stood out against the black wool of his dress jacket. Occasionally John would look at it, and make sure it was still there.

He sat in the third row of the amphitheater and faced the center platform. The other Spartans sat quietly on the concentric rings of risers. Spotlights flicked on the empty stage.

He had been in Reach's secure briefing chamber before. This is where Dr. Halsey had told them they were going to be soldiers. This is where his life had changed and he had been given a purpose.

Chief Mendez entered the room and marched to the center platform. He

wore his black dress uniform as well. His chest was covered with Silver and Bronze Stars, three Purple Hearts, the Red Legion of Honor award, and a rainbow of campaign ribbons. He had recently shaved his head.

The Spartans rose and stood at attention.

Dr. Halsey entered. She looked older to John, the wrinkles at the corners of her eyes and mouth more pronounced, streaks of gray in her dark hair. But her blue eyes were as sharp as ever. She wore gray slacks, a black shirt, and her glasses hung about her neck on a gold chain.

"Admiral on deck," Mendez announced, his voice ringing throughout the vast chamber.

They all snapped straighter.

A man ten years Dr. Halsey's senior strode to the stage. His short silver hair looked like a steel helmet. He wore a simple, unadorned black dress UNSC uniform. No medals or campaign

ribbons. The insignia on the forearm of his jacket, however, was unmistakable: the single gold star of a Rear Admiral. "At ease, Spartans," he said. "I'm Admiral Stanforth."

The Spartans took their seats in unison.

Dust swirled onstage and collected into a robed figure. Its face was obscured within the shadows of its hood. John could discern no hands at the end of its sleeves.

"This is Beowulf," Admiral Stanforth said as he gestured to the ghostly creature. Stanforth's voice was calm, but distaste was evident on his face. "He is our AI attaché with the Office of Naval Intelligence. "He turned away from the AI. "We have several important issues to cover this morning, so let's get started."

The lights dimmed. An amber sun appeared in the center of the room with three planets in close orbit.

"This is Harvest," he said. "Population of approximately three million. Although on the periphery of UNSC-controlled space on the outer rim, this world is one of our more productive and peaceful colonies, completely untouched so far by the Insurrection and the Rebellion war prior."

The holographic view zoomed in on the surface of the world and showed grasslands and forests and a thousand lakes swarming with schools of fish. In orbit a huge complex tethered to the apex of six orbital elevators acted as a hub for dozens of civilian transports and freighters looking to carry the massive amounts of food and grain the agricultural world produced.

"As of military calendar October 26nd, at 1423 hours, the Harvest orbital platform and Orbital Defense Network observation satellite twelve made long range X Band radar contact with this object."

A blurry outline appeared over the stage. Immediately John and the other Spartan's trained eyes took a snapshot and began analyzing the

object for every detail, though as the object was taken at such an extreme range, one million kilometers, the image was quite granny and fuzzy, but he could pick up just enough of the discernible structure that was bathed in light from the system's star that was right behind it to make out what it was.

A ship.

"Spectroscopic analysis proved inconclusive," Admiral Stanforth said. "The contact is constructed of material that is nearly 67 percent unknown to us."

A molecular absorption graph appeared on a side screen, spikes and jagged lines indicating the relative proportions of elements. It meant little to John, but he knew that it was significant none the less.

Beowulf raised a cloaked arm and the image darkened. The words CLASSIFIED "EYES ONLY", appeared over the blackened data.

Admiral Stanforth shot a glare at the AI that would kill as the AI's avatar briefly balked and gave into the silent command.

"Contact with Harvest and its defensive contingent," he continued, "was lost shortly thereafter, with this previous data sent by the colony's slipspace com launcher. The Colonial Military Administration sent the scout ship Argo to investigate. That ship arrived in-system on October twenty sixth, but other than a brief transmission to confirm their exit Slipstream position of a high orbit above the planet under the defense grid, no further reports were made.

"In response, Fleet Command assembled a battle group to investigate. The group consisted of the Destroyer Heracles, commanded by Captain Veredi, as well as the Corvettes Arabia and Vostok. They entered the Harvest System on November the forth and discovered the following."

The holograph of the planet Harvest changed. The lush fields and rolling hills transformed. Now dozens of new impact craters and fires raged where lush forests and plains had once been. In some places glass could be seen on the edges of the most heavily hit and craterous areas, with some places still glowing a dull red. The aforementioned orbital elevators and their transit hub were gone, with a smattering of debris in its place and a clear impact point of one of the collapsed elevators in view, devastating the world even more as it fell.

Orbital bombardment, with weapons in the high megaton range. Possibilities included both kinetic and nuclear.

"This is what was left of the colony." The Admiral paused for a moment to stare at the image, and then continued. "We assume that all inhabitants are lost."

Three million lives lost. John couldn't fathom the raw force it had taken to kill so many "for a moment he was torn between horror and envy. He glanced at the Purple Heart pinned to his chest and remembered his lost comrades. How did one simple bullet wound compare with so many wasted lives? He was suddenly no longer proud of the

decoration.

"And this is what the Heracles battlegroup found in orbit," Admiral Stanforth's voice knocked John's mind out of its momentary revile.

The video feed switched on, taken from the forward camera of the Heracles, the three United Nations Space Command ships accelerated forward towards a ship in high orbit 80,000 kilometers away as the, Light Frigates Arabia and Vostok pulled slightly ahead of the Heracles while the camera zoomed in.

It was unlike any ship John had seen before.

A 1.5 plus kilometer long triangular wedge with a dull grey hull dominated the screen as readings scrolled along the sides as the faint voice recordings of the ship's commanders echoed in the background. It wasn't related to any known UNSC or United Rebel Front ship design he had seen before, not that the later could build ships of this size anymore in the first place. Its hull was clearly heavily armored and dozens upon dozens of weapons ports from lighter guns to a battery of large main cannons located in a cluster of turrets dotted its surface. Most intriguing was a very clearly defined command center and possible bridge that rose up above the rest of the ship from the rear of the vessel, giving it the look of so many ancient sea going battleships of the steam age back on Earth. The glow from three large engine cones lit up the backdrop of the burning former Colony as the ship maneuvered itself to face the UNSC ships.

"The unidentified vessel," the Admiral said, "launched an immediate attack against our forces."

The video continued.

Green flashes strobed from the ship as a half dozen larger duller Bolts of energy coalesced into a fiery smear against the blackness of space. The deadly flashes of light impacted on the Arabia and splashed across its hull, imparting a massive amount of physical force causing a section of the affect area of the warship to shimmer like the surface of water while nearly a meter of titanium A composite battleplate instantly boiled away, and a plume of ignited atmosphere burst from the breach in the ship's hull.

Several bodies tumbled out into the unforgiving cold vacuum.

"Those were high intensity pulse lasers, much more powerful than those we currently deploy," Admiral Stanforth explained, "andâ€"if this record is to be believed,"

The video paused as one of the much larger fiery green bolts nearly blinded the camera, "â€"some kind high velocity, superheated plasma projectile contained within a high powered magnetic field."

The Heracles and Vostok launched salvos of Archer missiles toward the craft, the high powered Ion drives accelerating them to dozens of Gees as they tore across the distance. The Arabia fired her counter thrusters to right the ship's course as it joined its firepower into the fray. The two Frigates' and the Heracles' railguns charged and fired a volley of slugs, each weighing 700 pounds and travelling at

seven thousand kilometers a second, in lieu of the missiles, firing two more salvos as the magnetically accelerated slugs streaked towards the enemy.

The Heracles main gun, a single Magnetic Accelerator Cannon, the most powerful weapon in the UNSC's arsenal aside from their much larger "Super" MAC orbital defense platform brothers, charged and prepared to send a couple hundred ton slug at eight thousand kilometers a second screaming towards the threat.

No ship could survive such a hit of that magnitude and velocity.

Even without it the ship should have been crippled or heavily damaged.

Streams of energy bolts lashed out and reduced the number of missiles by a fourth before they reached their target, turning them into nothing more than vapors and free floating debris. However the balance of the missiles impacted, releasing their individual load of a two megaton shaped fusion warhead, detonating and covering the ship with fire and light, just as the first salvo from the human vessel's railguns hit the vessel now hidden inside the expanding firestorm . . . that quickly faded.

The strange ship shimmered with a semitransparent silver coating, which then vanished.

John's brow raised as the others looked on in mute silence. Was that anâ€|

"They also seem to have some reflective energy shield." Admiral Stanforth took a deep breath and his features hardened into a mask of grim resolve as the briefing continued.

The second and third railgun salvos hit, the shields shimmering again with each hit as they grew brighter, but still the impenetrable force held; the combined force of another twenty one megatons of force ,twice, simply bouncing off as the imparted energy pushed the enemy ship out of its position.

The enemy ship's maneuvering thrusters fired to put the enemy warship back onto the correct path.

The larger ship now faced the UNSC ships head on as the two forces accelerated towards each other at flank speed, cutting the range down to fifty thousand. The voices of the captains could be heard yelling out orders to fire again as the weapon's officer on the Heracles was heard announcing the MAC was at 60 percent charge.

More lasers and energy bolts lanced out from the unknown ship, catching the wounded Arabia and punching right through several decks. Explosions and decompression racked the ship as it spun out of formation lazily as the Heracles and the Vostok initiated a wild series of evasive maneuvers, causing several of the larger energy bolts to miss but the majority still impacted, slicing through armor and decks and knocking the Heracles' MAC out of action and sending the Vostok into a nearly uncontrolled lateral spin as its thrusters flickered on and off.

More missiles and another salvo of Railgun slugs expended themselves against the invisible force of the energy shields, to no avail, only succeeding in making their electrical flare even brighter.

It was obvious what the outcome was.

Another burst of energy fire turned the _Vostok_ into a miniature sun as its ruptured hull split in half and its Helium 3 boosted Fusion reactor overloaded. The _Heracles_ thicker hull survived only long enough for Captain Veredi to realize the battle was lost as the destroyer's frame nearly buckled from the explosive decompression of half a dozen new hull breaches.

The video cut out and the lights came back on, revealing the stern looks of all those present, and the new seeded anger and determination within.

"The _Vostok_ and _Arabia_ were lost with all hands. The _Heracles_ jumped out of the system, but due to the damage she sustained and only being able to travel at a forth of its Slipspace speed, it took several weeks for Captain Veredi to make it back to Reach.

"These weapons and defensive systems are currently beyond our technology. Therefore . . . this craft is possibly of nonhuman origin." He paused, then added, "The product of a race with technology far in advance of our own."

A murmur buzzed through the chamber.

"We have, of course, developed a number of first contact scenarios," the Admiral continued, "and Captain Veredi followed our established protocols. We had hoped that contact with a new race would be peaceful. Obviously this was not the case—the alien vessel did not open fire until our task force attempted to initiate communications."

He paused, considering his words. "Fragments of the enemy's transmissions were intercepted," he continued. "A few words have been translated as they use a different communication system than ours. We believe they call themselves, simply '_The Empire_'."

John stole a glance at the other Spartans, he knew that their mission and deployment parameters had suddenly changed. They were now going off to war, a real war.

Admiral Stanforth paced the stage for a second before continuing, "However, before opening fire, the alien ship broadcast the following message in the clear."

He gestured at Beowulf, who nodded. A moment later, a voice thundered from the amphitheater's speakers. John stiffened in his seat when he heard it; the voice from the speakers sounded odd, "strangely calm and formal and arrogant."

But most surprisingly of all, oddly human.

"We are the Galactic Empire. We hereby claim this system as our own, any attempt to interfere will be put down. Surrender your ships and vessels and prepare to be boarded."

Now the buzz in the amphitheater turned to a dull roar.

The Admiral cleared his throat, and the volume immediately dropped.

"Captain Veredi clearly refused, and further attempts of contact were immediately rebuffed."

John was awestruck. He stood, his new medal that he now lamented clanging against his ribbons..

"Yes, Spartan?" Stanforth said.

"Sir, is this a translation?"

"No," the Admiral replied. "They broadcast this to us in our language. We believe they may have used some kind of translation system to prepare the message . . . but it means they've been studying us for some time."

John took his seat.

"As of November 1, the UNSC has been ordered to full alert," Stanforth said. "Vice Admiral Preston Cole is mobilizing the largest fleet action since the Rebellion War to retake the Harvest System and confront this new threat. Their transmission made one thing perfectly clear: they're looking for a fight. And if they think they can take our worlds by such grievous force they can have their fight."

Only years of military discipline kept John rooted to his seat—otherwise he would have stood up and asked to volunteer on the spot. He would have given anything to go and fight. This was the threat he and the other Spartans had been training for all their lives—he was certain of it. Not scattered rebels, pirates, or political dissidents.

"Because of this UNSC-wide mobilization," Admiral Stanforth continued, "your training schedule will be accelerated to its final phase: Project MJOLNIR."

He stepped away from the podium and clasped his hands behind his back. "To that end, I'm afraid I have another unpleasant announcement." He turned to the Chief. "Chief Petty Officer Mendez will be departing us to train the next group of Spartans. Chief?"

John grabbed the edge of the riser. Chief Mendez had always been there for them, the only constant in the universe. Admiral Stanforth might as well have told him that Epsilon Eridani was leaving the Reach System.

The Chief stepped to the podium and clasped its edges.

"Recruits," he said, "soon your training will be complete, and you will graduate to the rank of Petty Officer Second Class in the UNSC. One of the first things you will learn is that change is part of a soldier's life. You will make and lose friends. You will move. This is part of the job." He looked to his audience. His dark eyes rested on each one of them. He nodded, seemingly satisfied with what he saw.

"The Spartans are the finest group of soldiers I have ever encountered," he said. "It has been a privilege to train you. Never forget what I've tried to teach youâ€”duty, honor, and sacrifice for the greater good of humanity are the qualities that make you the best."

He was silent a moment, searching for more words. But finding none, he stood at attention and saluted.

"Attention," John barked. The Spartans rose as one and saluted the Chief.

"Dismissed, Spartans," Chief Mendez said. "And good luck." He finished his salute.

The Spartans snapped down their arms. They hesitated, and then reluctantly filed out of the amphitheater.

John stayed behind. He had to talk to Chief Mendez.

Dr. Halsey spoke briefly with the Chief and the Admiral, then she and the Admiral left together.

Beowulf backed toward the far wall and faded away like a ghost.

The Chief gathered his hat, spotted John, and walked to him. He nodded to the hologram of the invaded colony, Harvest, still rotating in the air. "One final lesson, Petty Officer," he said. "What tactical options do you have when attacking a stronger opponent?"

"Sir!" John said. "There are two options. Attack swiftly and with full force at their weakest pointâ€”take them out quickly before they have a chance to respond."

"Good," he said. "And the other option?"

"Fall back," John replied. "Engage in guerrilla actions or get reinforcements."

The Chief sighed. "Those are the correct answers," he said, "but it may not be enough to be correct this time. Sit, please."

John sat, and the Chief settled next to him on the riser.

"There's a third option." The Chief turned his hat over in his hands. "An option that others may eventually consider. . .
."

"Sir?"

"Surrender," the Chief whispered. "That, however, is never an option for the likes of you and me. We don't have the luxury of backing down." He glanced up at Harvestâ€”a glittering ball of devastated earth. "And I doubt that an enemy like this will let us surrender."

"I think I understand, sir."

"Make sure you do. And make sure you don't let anyone else give up." He gazed into the shadows beyond the center platform. "Project MJOLNIR will make the Spartans into something . . . new. Something I could never forge them into. I can't fully explainâ€"that damned ONI spook is still here listeningâ€"just trust Dr. Halsey."

The Chief dug into his jacket pocket. "I was hoping to see you before they shipped me out. I have something for you." He set a small metal disk on the riser between them.

"When you first came here," the Chief said, "you fought the trainers when they took this away from youâ€"broke a few fingers as I recall." His chiseled features cracked into a rare smile.

John picked up the disk and examined it. It was an ancient silver coin, with an eagle on one side and the face of a man whose fame was long since forgotten. He flipped it between his fingers.

"That Eagle," Mendez said. "That bird is like youâ€"fast and deadly."

John closed his fingers around the quarter. "Thank you, sir."

He wanted to say that he was strong and fast because the Chief had made him so. He wanted to tell him that he was ready to defend humanity against this new threat. He wanted to say that without the Chief, he would have no purpose, no integrity, and no duty to perform. But John didn't have the words. He just sat there.

Mendez stood. "It has been an honor to serve with you." Instead of saluting, he held out his hand.

John got to his feet. He took the Chief's hand and they shook. It took a great deal of effortâ€"every instinct screamed at him to salute.

"Good-bye," Chief Mendez said.

He turned briskly on his heel and strode from the room.

John never saw him again.

**Epsilon Indi Star System **

**November 8th, 2525**

**Harvest**

"Creeper I have eyes on enemy infantry, more white washed bastards. Counting fifty of them, platoon strength." The rugged voice of Staff Sergeant Avery Johnson breathed into the the headset of the full helmet, complemented only by his heavy breathing as the combat armor's defogger worked overtime to keep the inside of his helmet from fogging up.

"Copy Bryne, I got ya, we will move up. They got any support?" Staff Sergeant Bryne replied as Johnson pushed himself forward closer to the dirt road that had been previously part of one of the many family owned farms that covered the surface of Harvest, half of which were either now burnt husks or had these Imperial bastards on them, or

whatever they called themselves.

The force amplifying servos in his M-55 Combat Armored Suit silently worked their magic as Johnson kept his head down, trying to keep his heavily armored mass blended into the high field of wheat that surrounded him, his armor's adaptive camouflage shifting color to attempt to blend in.

"Wait a secondâ€¦" the veteran Marine's voice halted Avery as the man took a deep breath and swore.

"Well tell me what the hell it is you see dammit."

"I've got eyes on light armor, more of those walking chicken like things, still no sign of UAVs or drones. And the last enemy air patrol was three hours ago, so we still have a two hour window."

Cursing silently to himself he checked his ammunition with a glance at his HUD, still green, but going for two weeks on the supplies they had ravaged from the Barracks of the Harvest Colonial Defense Forces base they were still going good, and after mounting three successful guerrilla raids against the enemy it was not too bad, considering they had limited UAV support, no air support, no armor, artillery, no surface to orbit batteries and no orbital support.

The enemy contacts drew closer and closer, into the fifty meter radius of his suit's motion sensors, as red contacts lit up the display.

As slowly as he could he reached into his belt and pulled out his fiber optic camera, being careful not to move too fast as he raised it to the top of the wind swept wheat as the camera's feed linked to his HUD and those of the other 18 Marines among the 44 Colonial Militiamen equipped with the same modern Battle Armor, and those that survived the initial first contact with these alienâ€¦.noâ€¦Imperial bastards.

The other garrisons on the planet were only boiling craters now, and not willing to give away their position the now late Lieutenant Ponders had cancelled any attempts to contact them, instead focusing on their partially successful attempt to retake the Tierra and evacuate the Colonists, before the Imperial Battleship had shown up.

After blasting the last transports filled with hundreds of people to kingdom come, and taking revenge for the Marine's destruction of the original Imperial ship that had come into the system, the Marines had evacuated the recaptured Tierra as the Imperial transports had moved in, letting them fill the elevator with troops and equipment before with one last round the planet's AI blew the whole structure apart with the Planet's lone Mass Driver.

Looking at the feed he grinned as some thirty then forty and then finally fifty of those enemy soldiers in their hilariously white armor marched in a column as three of the lumbering and heavily armed walkers took up the front and the rear of the formation.

Avery took a second to take in the vista beyond the field and of the horizon.

Smoke and storm clouds were on the horizon, no doubt a result of the orbital bombardment with hundreds of thousands of tons of ash and dirt expelled into the atmosphere. The Bifrost mountain range cut into the clouds as below the smoky and shattered ruin of Utgard, Harvest's once small but proud capitol of three hundred thousand, lay under occupation as enemy transports and ships flew to and from the city to the ship or ships in orbit.

"Avery , is team Charlie in position?" Bryne radioed from his position with the main force of the Colonial militia and Marines hidden in deep cover amongst the trees and underbrush that was on a squat rolling hill 200 meters away from the road, parallel to the enemy, the men , women and equipment all hidden under camo netting or the four optical Camo nets they had scrounged up.

"All good sir." Avery replied as the nine other Marines hidden around him in the tall wheat gave their affirmative status indicators, not breaking radio silence.

Bryne's voice again echoed through the comms, "Setting up the killbox in five.."

Johnson took several deep breaths and took a quick look at the statuses of the Marines next to him, most of his attention focused on Private Jenkins, the young Militia man having proved himself so far and donning the extra suit of combat armor after receiving the fastest on the job crash course training imaginable in the powered suit's operations.

It was much more complex, and lethal, than the traditional Ballistic BDU's the Colonial Militia wore.

"Get ready."

"Three, two, one—|..execute."

As one two M19 102mm shaped charge high explosive anti-tank missiles tore from the woods and cut across the distance in a second.

The two missiles covered the walkers in fire and thunder as a wall of fire and roar of UNSC weapons burst forth from the positions in the brush and trees and sent a hail of hypersonic projectiles and lead into the Imperial formation.

Avery silently cheered as the walkers, their frames and "head" twisted and blown open, crashed to the ground as a half dozen enemy Imperial soldiers limp bodies fell hit the dirt, their armor punctured and sliced through, killing the being within.

The third walker turned to bring its heavy weapons to bare on the new threat as the enemy soldiers all scattered and ran for the cover of the reverse slope and the ravine that ran the opposite side of the road, sending scattered return fire with their directed energy rifles, the angry red bolts of energy tearing through the air and setting the brush ablaze.

Just as the enemy walker was about to fire on the defender's position a hypersonic crack and shriek bellowed as a 20mm tungsten dart slammed into the walker, hitting it right square in the reverse knee

joint.

A perfect shot from the mounted Gauss Cannon on the back of a concealed Warthog LRV.

The damaged leg could no longer hold up the weight of the heavy vehicle as it toppled over with a crash, the crew trying to get out of their inactive vehicle as one of the heavy machine guns tore them apart.

"Move." Avery breathed as he stood up, bringing his rifle and equipped weapons to bare, the others following suit as his HUD automatically tagged the enemy soldiers and high lighted them as his targeting reticule on his MA6 activated.

"Light 'em up"

From their position, now flanking the enemy on the reverse side of the ravine with a slight defilade in their favor and hidden at the edge of the wheat field, the Imperials only warning that they were suddenly under attack from their right flank was when the first of the white armored soldiers fell, its armor perforated by four precise shots from Jenkin's Mattock Gauss Battle Rifle as the 5mm magnetically accelerated rounds of the heavier weapon sliced through the Imperial at 2300 meters per second with lethal results.

Johnson aimed down the holographic red dot and pulled the trigger, just as the other Marines did so, unleashing a hail of deadly accurate fire.

The battery in the butt of his MA6B sent three separate charges to the propellant of the first 8mm round of the fifteen stacked end to end in each of the weapon's three barrels which were affixed in a triangle within the weapon's unique barrel shroud, giving him a total of 45 in each ammo strip. The resulting electro-thermal-chemical reaction turned the propellant into a jet of superhot gas, sending the copper wrapped tungsten projectile screaming at 1800 meters a second out of the rifle in a thunderous crack as the rifle's recoil mitigation system kicked in, the outer copper layer of the projectile nearly liquefied from the heat.

Avery pulled the trigger two more times as the weapon kicked against his armored pauldron, and watched in satisfaction as the targeted enemy soldier's body withered as two more high velocity rounds lethally ripped into the fragile body within. As the tungsten core of the rounds pierced and penetrated the white plastoid armor that the "stormtroopers" wore, imparting its kinetic energy in a wave on the flesh within, the softer and white hot copper expanded within the Imperial Trooper. The result was instantaneously lethal as the remaining mass of the rounds tore out the back of the targeted enemy soldier's armor leaving football sized holes, nearly ripping the trooper in half.

The fire from the others with him claimed four more Imperials as the others dove for what little cover they could find amongst the rocks and began to return fire, crimson bolts of energy flying back towards the Marines as they accurately returned fire.

A single bolt caught one of the Marines in the chest on his left side, the superhot bolt of energy striking the nearly two inch thick

armored chest of the man's battle suit. The standard UNSC Marine M-55 Battlsuit that the Marine was encased in consisted of a two inch thick, (on the most heavily armored portions) composite outer shell of Titanium A fused with a thin layer of depleted uranium with a half inch thick inner layer of electrified liquid metal and carbon fibers that were in turned bolted onto the reactive nano bodysuit that each Marine wore and gave the power suit its strength enhancing properties thanks to the double fist sized hydrogen reactor on the back. The battle suits were tried and true at resisting near innumerable amounts of small arms fire and multiple bursts of military grade Gauss rifles. However against directed energy weapons and Plasma its supremacy, which UNSC Marines had long enjoyed in firefights, was diminished.

The bolt imparted its physical force first, which was absorbed by the outer and inner armor with ease, but its high energy gas and particles burned away armor , liquid metal and carbon nano tubes in a flash, leaving an ugly sizzling hole as the Marine cried in pain as the man was spun to the ground. Alive, as the armor did its job, but left with third degree burns on his chest and with his protection on that portion of the suit degraded as the Marines moved to provide cover, allowing the Marin's spinal implants to inject a dose of painkillers, neutralizing the pain as the wounded Marine rolled back up to a firing position as his squadmates ran through the hail of crimson energy weapons fire at some 14 miles an hour, brutally cutting Imperials down all the same.

"Target right!" Johnson shouted as he and Jenkins pivoted as they fired on the move, cutting into an unlucky Imperial trooper as twin roaring barks of hypersonic slugs tore the soldier in two from sixty yards out as the Imperials on his side of the embankment found themselves surrounded.

However they were not going down without a fight, as a trio of energy weapons fire cut into a Marine on his right, this time burning through the man's battle suit and snuffing out the man's life as Avery cursed as several angry red bolts flew right past his face, nearly dazzling him as he spun around to face his attacker with his rifle ready .

Firing from the hip accurately thanks to his HUDs integrated targeting with his weapon he cut down the Imperial Trooper hiding behind a small bolder with a rather long snarling burst of fire before the enemy soldier could get another chance to hit him, nearly splitting the man in two in the process and turning most of the bolder into dust for good measure.

By this point the engagement was over, as the Imperials having been caught completely by surprise were finished off as the remaining ones on the other side of the road closest to the forest were cut down in the open with little cover to fall on as the last five of the white-washed enemies had their bodies dance around like ragdolls as the heavy machine gun and a dozen Colonial Guard's rifles brutally cut them into literal pieces.

"All Clear" Bryne calmly called through the comms as suddenly as the roaring firefight, though muffled though his suit, began, it was replaced with eerie calm.

Johnson and the other Marines with him strode through the death and

destruction of the killing field past bodies and the burning husks of the destroyed walkers, weapons still ready just in case as the others came to secure the area.

As Johnson moved to regroup with the others Bryne jogged into view, his favored ARC-920 anti-material Railgun on his back and a M-739 Squad Automatic Weapon in his hands, its barrel still smoking from sending streams of deadly near hypersonic 10 mm rounds from its ammo drum. All the while the Marines and the Colonial Guard troopers made sure the area was secured as they pilfered weapons from the Imperials, which they would have to revert to using soon as their ammunition was depleted.

The veteran Marine, having served multiple tours with Johnson in battling back Innies on Tribute, had held pent up anger towards Johnson for his actions in an attack that had led to the loss of half of his squad and dozens of innocent civilians thanks to a cowardly suicide attacker. The two had long served together in a career that started during the middle of the Rebellion War twelve years earlier, and the anger had nearly destroyed their friendship. However that anger evaporated as the two, after being transferred to Harvest to help train and augment the lightly defended world's Colonial Guard along with the help of two platoons of Marines in defending against rising Innies attacks in the sector that ONI believed was supported by the remnants of the United Rebel Front, were forced to suddenly fight off a full blown invasion from an unknown enemy calling itself calling itself the Empire.

"How many casualties?" Johnson asked simply as he depolarized his visor looking into the sky as if waiting for energy bolts to rain down from space.

"Light, only two with another wounded. We got them good today." Bryne replied as Johnson nodded before he shook his head.

"We cant do this for much longer, before long they are gonna find us and we are gonna run out of basic supplies." Avery replied as the big Marine nodded.

"We need to get back into the forest and camp, and as I have no radar and anti air we can only guess when their H shaped fighters show up with reinforcements, or it they decide to simply vape the area from orbit."

"Yeah, we need to get moving, lets disappear." Avery shouted into the comms as the Marines and Colonial Guardsmen responded by leaving the area as fast as they could on foot and with the four vehicles they had, leaving Avery to wish that he had a simple armored force of Grizzly MBTs or a Vulture Assault Gunship to rain hell on the enemy with hypersonic cruise missiles , cannon fire or a Mini MAC slug.

In the end he simply let his mind wonder back to the thought that was in every man's head, how much longer could they last and would the UNSC send any reinforcements soon.

2. Chapter 2

****_****YES SOME OF THE CONTEXT IN THIS AND THE EARLY CHAPTERS IS FROM THE FALL OF REACH BEFORE SOMEONE POINTS THAT OUT...I DONT OWN

HALO OR STAR WARS OR ANYTHING CONNECTED TO THEM.****

****Enjoy and Merry Belated Christmas!****

**2 ABY**

_**November 7**__**th**__**, 2525 (UNSC Calendar)**_

**Imperial II Class Star Destroyer **

**ISD Admonitor**

**In Orbit of former "UNSC" Colony world of Harvest**

Grand Admiral Thrawn frowned as he read the latest reports from the commanders on the surface of the world identified as "Harvest".

Yet another damn raid by these UNSC soldiers.

And the Stormtroopers had again been left bloodied and suffered heavy losses.

A full platoon of Stormtroopers and three AT-ST's seemingly caught by surprise and slaughtered in a hail of deadly accurate projectiles that had challenged his traditional opinion about such weapons.

For the past eight days now the soldiers of this "UNSC", "_or was it UEG?"_, had given him and the commanders under him constant headaches and supprises, no less of which was the destruction of the Acclamator Class Assault ship _Devair_ whom had made first contact with these UNSC types with a fission weapon somehow smuggled next to the ships landing zone as it attempted to offload troops directly onto the planet.

A fission weapon of all things

Next as the word of the first contact was sent to the sector command and reinforcements from the main Fleet slowly made their way into some of the furthest reaches of the Unknown Regions ever travelled by an Imperial Warship; the damned UNSC Soldiers had taken the several days to evacuate nearly 90 percent of the planet's initial population and had recaptured the skyhook orbital elevators in a bloody battle that again left a lopsided number of Stormtroopers dead.

However in a move that made Thrawn tip his hat to the opponent the "UNSC Marines", had committed a holding battle as the first Imperial Ship sent to investigate the incident from the nearest sector fleet, the Imperial Class Star Destroyer _Fires of Mustafar_, had sent in nearly a full Regiment of Stormtroopers and commandos to take back the critical station as the last enemy transports were intercepted.

As the Imperial soldiers flooded into the station and prepared to flood onto the surface, they found the station empty.

It had taken them only a minute too long to realize that the enemy had retreated the majority of their forces from the station already and the couple of dozen whom had put up a stiff initial resistance suddenly to disengage and perform a spacejump off of the station.

Not a minute after the enemy soldiers in their ever more-respectable power suits made a decent into the atmosphere a single Mass Driver on the planet that had escaped initial detection, fired a hyper velocity slug into the center of the station, obliterating the unshielded structure and all of the Imperials within.

The commander of the _Fires of Mustafar_, incensed at the loss of that many troops had very nearly ordered a Base Delta Zero as nearly half of the small population centers were turned into slag and all of the military bases groundside were turned into glass, as well as large portions of the main continental landmass.

Just two days before the _Admonitor_ had arrived in system with the fellow Imperial Class Star destroyers _Reprisal_ and _Judicator_ along with their escorts the _Fires of Mustafar_ had come under assault from three frigate sized warships claiming to represent the UNSC. In the brief engagement the Star Destroyer had been hit dozens of times from , as the captain's report from the _Fires of Mustafar_ detailed, "Primitive", high velocity railguns and high explosive missiles.

The Imperial Class Star Destroyer had dispatched these foes quickly, destroying the two smaller Corvette type vessels as the larger Frigate sized ship was heavily damaged but managed to escape.

As Thrawn's red eyes red over the report on his Holopad he took note of the damage taken by the _Fires of Mustafar's_ shield.

Twelve and three quarters percent.

Not the most terribly primitive weapons if they could somewhat scratch the shielding of an Imperial Class II Star Destroyer, considering the size of those ships and the renowned power of a Star Destroyers shielding.

Also listed in the report was the briefly detected buildup of energy at the bow of the lead heavier ship that disappeared after its bow took Turbo laser fire.

A heavier primary weapon system perhaps?

The Chiss Admiral made sure to note it lest it be forgotten.

However most intriguing was the apparent use of previously unknown form of Faster Than Light Travel.

The anomaly that the three warships, and the first ship that arrived in system that was immediately shot down, arrived out of had astounded the officers on the Imperial warships whom had immediately reported back to sector command.

That discovery had interested Thrawn the most, whom had dedicated all of his science officers and computers to research this new form of FTL. So far they could only guess at what it was, but it was an extra dimension like hyperspace just by the appearance of the anomaly and the few scans they had returned, but other than that they had no clue.

And that meant less intelligence, and less intelligence meant that

these UNSC types could have tactical supremacy without him knowing about it. As such he had planned for any eventuality as much as he could, placing his fleet accordingly.

Of course the Chiss Admiral began to reminisce about how he had arrived here in the first place.

He had received reports from some of his usual scouting ships assigned to his secretive mission that operated along the border of the Empire of The Hand that a colony of advanced humans had been located. Knowing that Palpatine did not want anyone to know of the existence of a shadow state in the unknown regions right next to Chiss space that was run by one of his Grand Admirals, he had personally sent the message to the nearest sector command under the guise that a possible location for a Rebel base had been found, and that he was dispatching his ship to investigate.

However before he had been able to order his ships to launch a priority message from Coruscaunt had came through, from the Emperor himself.

It ordered him to go investigate, but to wait until word from a regular Imperial Acclamator Assault ship came through.

The order had puzzled several of his officers, including Captain Dagon Niriz, the _Admonitor's_ and Thrawn's longtime associate and First Officer Voss Parck, whom had joined him in his "exile" and secret mission to pacify the unknown regions.

However to Thrawn it unfortunately made sense. He had been campaigning for nearly a year and a half now and had successfully established the Empire of The Hand, however he knew better than to fully trust the Emperor.

No this official deployment was a test to see just how "pacified" the Unknown Regions were, and to see if the Grand Admiral Mitth'raw'nuruodo had been acting like the Emperor's proper pet. And to remind the Admiral of his place.

The Admiral winced inwardly, as he knew the real reason the Emperor had an interest in pacifying the unimportant and largely unexplored Unknown regions, the looming threat that he and the Emperor, among others, recognized coming soon on the horizon.

However Thrawn did have enough leverage on the Emperor that he wouldn't be disposed of like so many officers his right hand man, Lord Vader had wastefully force choked.

He knew too much of Palpatine's past, but he was too valuable to be silenced with death.

Hence his current mission far away from the galactic community.

In addition to the _Admonitor_, he had three Imperial Star Destroyers in the system, the _Reprisal_, the _Fires of Mustafar_, and the _Judicator_, a force in and of itself powerful enough to quell any discontent in a system with less than a Class Three defense force. Yet on top of that he had brought along with his Flagship three smaller Victory II Class Star Destroyers, _Incinda, Battle of Rakata, and White Storm_, as well as an escorting fleet of six heavily

upgraded and modernized Dreadnaught Class Heavy Cruisers, five Nebulon B Escort Frigates and a single Acclamator Assault Ship.

However the most menacing ship in the fleet that command was sending was just arriving now, as a gigantic rupture in hyperspace tore itself open 10,000 kilometers in front of the _Admonitor_ and her escorts and gave a gigantic sensor return as it reverted back into real-space.

A 4,800 meter long beast of armor and weapons, a Preator Mark II Class Battlecruiser was well known as the third most individually powerful warship in the Imperial Fleet behind the gigantic _Executer_, Lord Vader's flagship and the first in a line of several Super Star Dreadnaughts bearing the class's name.

Though it had lost some of its luster when Vader's flagship went on its own rampage through multiple sectors annihilating whole squadrons of Rebel ships single handedly in an attempt to catch the Rebels on their now abandoned base on Yavin two years ago the Preator Class warship before him, the _Imperium_, was still more than a match for a squadron of Mon Calimari Star Cruisers.

Thrawn was taken out of his brief daze as the comms channel came to life on the main viewer.

And the face of an Imperial Admiral no less, as the IFF of the ship flashed on the screen.

ISS Helmsman

"I wasn't expecting to see you here , Admiral Mils Gail." Thrawn replied as the larger and imposing bear of a man Mils Gail scowled.

"I wasn't expecting to be under the command of the exiled _Chiss_ Grand Admiral Thrawn either." The man replied with a hint of poison as he saluted the higher ranking Grand Admiral.

Thrawn inwardly scowled as the man spat out the word Chiss like a bad tasting food. However he had grown long used to the xenophobia that many in the Empire held, including the Emperor, but he had proven himself better than nearly all of them, and had earned their respect in the end, and his position.

Still he couldn't help himself as he thought of at least five different ways to cripple or destroy the warship before him.

"I apologize then for your discomfort, but we have a mission to accomplish." Thrawn replied curtly.

"Take a position 10,000 kilometers above the world in a high orbit and establish a permanent overwatch as my ship and the others secure the system. I want a battery of turbolasers placed around the primary urban center for low orbit defense just in case with a defensive shield array covering the area as well along with where our forces have established themselves. In case these UNSC types mount a larger counter attack we need to be ready."

The Admiral snarled nearly and nodded.

"Yes Admiral, will do. Gail Out." The line went dead as the huge warship that was the Helmsman pushed itself into a high orbit as Thrawn's trusted first officer came to his side.

Voss Patrik chuckled.

"Friendly fellow isn't he?"

Thrawn nodded for a second before turning around to face Voss.

"Very," he replied with a smirk as he continued, "but he has command over a very significant fleet that is nearly the size of an entire core sector fleet and then some, its nearly the size of the defenses of Imperial Center itself, which means that the Emperor more than likely wishes to hasten the conquest of the Unknown Regions if that Armada handed over for use. Unfortunately that may mean we loose control over the Empire of the Hand."

Voss nodded and frowned, "Then what action shall we take?"

Thrawn turned back around to gaze out the transparasteel into the swirling stars and the orb of the planet in the distance.

"Its too early to do anything more than wait. However I still took liberty to dispatch multiple scouting vessels across the nearest star systems to this system, maybe we can gather more intel on this UNSC in the meantime."

**1750 Hours, November 7th, 2525 **

**UNSC Paris Class Heavy Frigate**

**UNSC Commonwealth **

**Chi Ceti 4**

**En route to UNSC Damascus Materials Testing Facility**

The view screen in the bunkroom of the UNSC frigate Commonwealth clicked on as the ship entered normal space. Ice particles showered the external camera and gave the distant yellow sun, Chi Ceti, a ghostly ring.

John watched and continued to ponder the word Mjolnir as they sped in-system. He had looked it up in the education database. Mjolnir was the hammer used by the Norse god of thunder. Project MJOLNIR had to be some kind of weapon. At least he hoped it was; they needed something to fight the Empire

If it was a weapon, though, why was it here at the Damascus testing facility, on the very edge of UNSC controlled space? He had only even heard of this system twenty-four hours ago.

He turned and surveyed the squad. Although this bunkroom had one hundred beds, the Spartans still clustered together, playing cards, polishing boots, reading, exercising. Sam sparred with Kellyâ€”although she had to slow herself down considerably to give him a chance.

John was reminded that he didn't like being on starships. The lack of control was disturbing. If he wasn't stuck in "the freezer"â€”the starship's cramped, unpleasant cryo chamberâ€”he was left waiting and wondering what their next mission would be.

During the last three weeks the Spartans had handled a variety of minor missions for Dr. Halsey. "Tying up loose ends," she had called it.

Putting down rebel factions on Jericho VII. Removing a black-market bazaar near the Roosevelt military base on Arcadia. Each mission had brought them closer to the Chi Ceti System.

John had made sure every member of his squad had participated in these missions. They had performed flawlessly. There had been no losses. Chief Mendez would have been proud of them.

"_Spartan-117,"_Dr. Halsey's voice blared over the loudspeaker.

"_Report to the bridge immediately_."

John snapped to attention and keyed the intercom.

"Yes, ma'am!" He turned to Sam. "Get everyone ready, in case we're needed. On the double."

"Affirmative," Sam said. "You heard the Petty Officer. Dog those cards. Get into uniform, soldiers!"the larger Spartan shouted as John left the Marine's quarters the Spartans had occupied and made his way to the bridge of the 534 meter long Frigate.

John double-timed it to the elevator and punched the code for the bridge. Gravity faded out and then back again as the elevator passed between the gravity generator plating on each deck of the ship.

The doors parted and he stepped onto the bridge.

It was a hive of activity. Every wall had a screen. Some showed stars and the distant red smear of a nebula. Other screens displayed the fusion reactor status and spectrum of microwave broadcasts in the system as officers professionally watched at their stations and gave out status updates.

A brass railing ringed the center of the bridge, and within sat four Junior Lieutenants at their stations: navigation, weapons, communications, and ship operations.

John halted and saluted the commander of the ship, Captain Wallace whom stood at the fore of the bridge by the meter thick transparent steel looking out into the stars that swirled past the imposing angular and forked bow of the _Commonwealth_ that contained its primary weapon system of the nearly brand new ship, a Mk II Magnetic Accelerator Cannon, or MAC for short. A spinally mounted weapon that accelerated a 100 ton tungsten slug to a frightening speed of 8,000 kilometers a second that could destroy any known ship in a single hit unlucky enough to be on the receiving end of a kinetic energy release equivalent to 764 megatons of TNT.

Standing next to him reading a report on her flexipad Dr. Catherine Halsey pecked away at the small screen as John stopped and saluted the captain and then nodded to Dr. Halsey.

John remained saluting until the Captain returned the gesture.

"Over here, please," Dr. Halsey said. "I want you to see this."

John walked across the deck and gave his full attention to the screen Dr. Halsey and Captain

Wallace were scrutinizing. It displayed deconvoluted radar signals. It looked like tangled yarn to John.

"Thereâ€" " Dr. Halsey pointed to a blip on the screen. "It's there again."

Captain Wallace stroked his dark beard, thinking, then said, "That puts our ghost at eighty million kilometers. Even if it were a ship, it would take a full hour to get within weapons range. And besidesâ€" "

He waved at the screen. "â€"it's gone again."

"May I suggest that we go to battle stations, Captain," Dr. Halsey told him.

"I don't see the point," he said condescendingly; the Captain was clearly less than pleased about having a civilian on his bridge.

"We haven't let this be widely known," she said, "but when the aliens were first detected at Harvest, they appeared at extreme range . . . and then they were suddenly much closer."

"An intrasystem jump?" John asked.

Dr. Halsey smiled at him. "Correctly surmised, Spartan."

"That's not possible," Captain Wallace remarked. "Slipstream space can't be navigated that accurately."

"You mean we cannot navigate with that kind of accuracy, and more over we did not detect a slipspace exit from the ship" she said.

"Do you mean that they could use a different mode of FTL?" Wallace asked as the Captain clenched and unclenched his jaw.

Tension hung in the air for several seconds.

Walking over to his command chair and sitting down he clicked the intercom. "General quarters: all hands to battle stations. Seal bulkheads. I repeat: all hands, battle stations. This is not a drill. Reactors to ninety percent. Come about to course one two five. Plasma Barrier up. Warm up weapons and bring our Helix Hellilical CIWS and Point Defense Lasers Online."

The bridge lights darkened to a red hue as the crew rushed to their action stations and the officers all began giving calm status reports as they went about their tasks.

The deck rumbled beneath John's boots and the entire ship tilted as it changed heading. Pressure doors slammed shut and sealed John on the bridge.

The Commonwealth stabilized on her new heading, and Dr. Halsey crossed her arms. She leaned over and whispered to John, "We'll be using one of the _Commonwealth 's_ dropships to go to the testing facility on Chi Ceti Four. We have to get to Project MJOLNIR." She turned back and watched the radar screen and focused on the Imperial vessel.

"Before they do. So get the others ready."

"Yes, ma'am." John keyed the intercom. "Sam, muster the squad in Bay Alpha. I want that Pelican loaded and ready for drop in fifteen minutes."

"We'll have it done in ten," Sam replied. "Faster if those Longsword interceptor pilots get out of our way."

John would have given anything to be below decks with the others. He felt as if he were being left behind.

**ISS Repulsor **

**Imperial Nebulon B Frigate**

"Contact is moving unto an intercept vector, we are being scanned by a high bandwidth scanning system, and the target is activating weapons systems, ECM and a pseudo defensive shield barrier." The scanning officer announced as Captain Vaan Quintos grinned as he took up a holographic representation of the "You Ennn Ess See " warship, taking in its forked forward hull and its layout.

Primitives.

Admiral Thrawn had sent his ship along with several other Nebulon B Frigates to scout the systems closest to the world of "Harvest" to locate any more worlds under the control of this human empire so that they would be more properly subjugated by the Empire of the Hand and Thrawn at a later time.

After a day of scouting this system they came across this vessel, heading to the small and partially habitable planet in the system, on some sort of mission that was yet to be determined.

In the meantime he decided he would take the opportunity and destroy this target of opportunity, though he doubted it would be a challenge.

"Open up a short ranged hyperspace window, and take us into range, 30,000 off of their bow. And man Battlestations"

"Aye sir." The XO nodded as the Klaxons began to wail.

**UNSC Commonwealth**

The radar screen flashed as the holographic screens throughout the

bridge gave shrill alarms and warnings.

Out of nowhere a single ship seemed to stretch into existence thirty thousand kilometers off of the Frigate's bow.

"Cameras zoom in on that contact!" Wallace shouted as the forward viewcreen zoomed in to show the Imperial warship.

Its design was unlike the one witnessed at Harvest, instead of a triangular wedge, this much smaller ship of about 300 meters was split into two distinct sections, a larger vertical forward section connected by a thin connecting spar-like middle section to an aft engine section.

Tiny lights winked on and off along its hull, their source either windows or weapons. It was half of the size of the _Commonwealth_

"An Imperial ship," Dr. Halsey said, and she involuntarily backed away from the view screens.

Captain Wallace scowled. "COM officer: send a signal to Chi Cetiâ€"see if they can send us some reinforcements."

"Aye, sir.", the officer towards the back of the bridge replied as he got to work.

Green flashes flickered along the hull of the alien shipâ€"so bright that even filtered through the external camera, they still made John's eyes water.

The thick outer hull of the _Commonwealth_ sizzled and popped as the deck trembled beneath John's feet. Three screens filled with static.

"Pulse Lasers!" the lieutenant at the ops station screamed.

"Communication dish destroyed. Armor in sections three and four holding at sixty-five percent. Hull breach in section three. Sealing now. Plasma Barrier ineffective" The Lieutenant swiveled in his seat, sweat beaded on his forehead. "Ship AI core memory overloaded."

"Those were some damn powerful lasers." Captain Wallace muttered as he went about directing the ship.

"The Plasma Barrier? It didn't stop it?" one officer asked aloud as Halsey turned to answer the woman's question.

"Our Plasma Barriers are only effective against Kinetic impacts, not focused energy like lasers. If this smaller ship carries those Plasma pulse weapons like the one encountered at Harvest then we will find out if they are effective as Plasma has kinetic properties, unlike lasers."

The Plasma Barrier was based off an old technology in use since the late 21st century that was originally invented and theorized in the late 20th in North America, originally called a Plasma Window and was designed to protect spacecraft from space debris collisions. They

worked by filling a volume of space with plasma confined by a magnetic field. By the time of the Insurrection and the Rebellion, the technology had advanced to the point where a wall of highly focused plasma could be projected to the front or the sides of a vessel or spacecraft to protect against physical impacts and debris. The military grade plasma Barriers are strong enough to deflect, stop or slow down rail gun slugs and missiles. Their weakness was the fact that they were ineffective against lasers and that they could only be focused at one direction at a time, rendering it ineffective against multi-dimensional attacks.

In addition, with the AI offline, the ship could still fire weapons and navigate through Slipstream space, but John knew it would take more time to make jump calculations with the standard back up computers.

"Come to heading zero three zero, declination one eight zero," Caption Wallace ordered. "Arm Archer missile pods A through F. And give me a firing solution."

"Aye aye," the navigation and weapons officers said. "A through F pods armed." They furiously tapped away on their keypads and holographic screens.

Seconds ticked by. "Firing solution ready, sir."

"Fire."

"Pods A through F firing!"

The _Commonwealth_ had twenty-six pods, each loaded with thirty Archer Fusion missiles. On screen, pods A through F opened, and launchedâ€”80 bluish plumes of rocket exhaust that traced a path from the _Commonwealth_ to the alien ship.

The enemy adjusted its course and presented its larger port side to the oncoming threat. John Arched his eyebrow. "_Why would you present your larger profile towards the enemy? Was it poor tactics or was there more to it?"_

The Archer missiles altered their trajectory to track the ship, their ion reaction engines pushing them to a velocity of dozens of Gees as they tore through the distance, unlike the previous encounter only a dozen of them being felled by the enemy's pulse lasers.

Twenty seconds later the mass of missiles impacted.

Dozens of Multimegaton firestorms briefly covered the alien ship, blinding the sensors briefly and obscuring the ship in light.

"Good work, Lieutenant," Captain Wallace said, and he clapped the young officer on the shoulder.

Dr. Halsey frowned and stared at the screen. "No," she whispered. "Wait."

The fire flared, then dimmed. The skin of the alien ship rippled like heat wavering off a hot road in the summer. It fluttered with a metallic blue screen, then brilliant whiteâ€”and the fire faded, revealing the ship beneath.

It was completely undamaged.

"Energy shields," Dr. Halsey muttered. She tapped her lower lip, thinking. "Even their ships this small have energy shielding."

"Lieutenant," the Captain barked at the nav officer. "Cut main engines and fire maneuvering and track so that we're pointing at that thing."

"Aye aye, sir."

The distant rumbling of the _Commonwealth 's_ main engines dimmed and stopped and she turned about.

Her inertia kept the ship speeding toward the testing facilityâ€"now flying backward.

"What are you doing, Captain?" Dr. Halsey asked.

"Fire our railgun battery at that thing, and work on another lock with the Archers, and Arm the MAC," Captain Wallace told the weapons officer. "Full Charge."

John understood: Turning your back to an enemy only gave them an advantage. Even in the complexities of multidimensional combat in space the basic laws applied.

**ISS Repuslor**

"Impact!" the weapons officer cried as Vaan Quintos stumbled and nearly lost his footing as the swarm of enemy missiles expended themselves against the _Repulsors_ shields.

Alarms flashed throughout the bridge as the ship was thrown nearly a mile off of course as its shields sizzled and sparked with electricity as the brief hellish fireballs extinguished themselves in the vacuum.

"Kryff that was a lot of missiles!" he thought aloud as the navigations officer righted the ship and placed it back on its heading. He tried to remember a time when a single enemy ship release that amount of missiles at once.

"Damage report!"

"Minor damage to our Static discharge veins, Particle shields holding at 68 percent and recharging sir."

Quintos grinned.

"Maintain fire with broadside turbo laser batteries, charge them to full power. Turn them into debris." He ordered.

"Yes sir. Target is spinning around on its axis and bringing its bow to bare, target is firing us with multiple hyper velocity rail guns."

"Ignore them and keep firing!"

UNSC Commonwealth

"MAC capacitors charging," the weapons officer announced as the alien ship turned its side toward the Commonwealth yet again.

"Yes," Captain Wallace murmured. "Give me a bigger target."

Pinpoints of Green light glowed and then flared along the alien hull as much larger strobes of light cut across the darkness of space like a knife.

The larger bolts impacted first as the Commonwealth's Plasma Barrier, directed to cover the bow of the Frigate, flared a brilliant fiery red as the first half dozen of the larger energy pulses expended themselves against the protective barrier and dissipating their heat and destructive power into the coldness of space.

However the Barrier and its emitter immediately overloaded and the protective wall collapsed with a spark and a brief dissipating of plasma.

Allowing the second salvo of the enemy's Energy Pulses to slam into the ship.

The Commonwealth's meter thick composite Titanium A Battleplate stood up to the extreme heat and energy for all but a second as a half dozen hull breaches appeared along the ship's hull as armor melted and was torn off and whole sections were destroyed and a port side Longsword Interceptor bay was simply vaporized .

The deck buckled beneath the crew and threatened to throw the Spartan to the deck as alarm bells howled yet again as he gripped the railing tight enough to bend it in his superhuman grasp.

The Commonwealth was thrown half a mile off its previous vector, with half a dozen new hull breaches as the ship's helmsman corrected the ship's course by firing its counter thrusters and a brief pulse from its main engines.

Just as the rumbling ended the tactical view screens on the nose of the Commonwealth went dead.

John heard sizzling overheadâ€”then the muffled thumps of explosive decompressions.

"More pulse laser hits," the ops officer reported. "Armor in section three through seven down fourteen inches. Barrier down. Secondary Navigation dish destroyed. Hull breaches on decks two, five, and nine. We have a leak in the port water tanks." The Lieutenant's hand shakily danced over the controls. "Pumping fuel to starboard tanks. Sealing sections. Hull integrity is reaching critical limits sir! We can take another salvo like that or we will be spilt in two! And our Reactor is nearing the Redline."

John shifted on his feet. He had to move. Act. Standing hereâ€”unable to get to his squad, not doing anythingâ€”was counter to every fiber of his being.

"Fire forward railguns! Give 'em another spread of Archers!" Wallace commanded as the forward railgun batteries flashed four times. Each salvo sending four 700 pound projectiles screaming towards the enemy ship at 10,000 kilometers a second, and each salvo slamming into the shields of the Alien ship with approximately 13 megatons apiece, igniting the electrical firestorm of the enemy's energy shields and knocking the enemy warship off of its course yet again as another three dozen Archers added yet more city destroying firepower to the fray as they followed suite.

The Imperial Ship again re-appeared defiantly from its energy blister, noticeably still aflame and with a burst of speed from its engines began to cut into the _Commonwealth's_ lead as another half dozen energy pulses again began to form on the prow of the enemy warship.

"Navigation activate Emergency Thrusters!" Captain Wallace shouted as more pulse lasers bored into the hull of the UNSC Frigate, several causing puffs of air to escape from yet more hull breaches.

"Yes sir! Thrusters activated!"

The portion of the main viewscreen zoomed in on the Imperial warship, throwing up an analysis of the energy readings of the Imperial ship. The obvious weapons ports glowed white against the red outline of the ship and the blackness of space.

The energy readings went even higher as the crew waited in near silence.

"MAC at 100 percent charge sir!" the Weapons Officer cried.

Captain Wallace turned back to the man, "Fire a full spread of Archers. I want a Time to target impact with their shields. Overwhelm those bastards with everything we got."

The crew nodded as the enemy closed the distance to the _Commonwealth_ like a shark smelling blood, in the case where blood was a trail of debris and escaping atmosphere that left a faint trail that traced the _Commonwealth's_ path.

"Come on you Bastard!"

"Range twenty five thousand!"

John looked on with a growing sense of dread. This would either work or he would be nothing more than floating debris.

"Fire Archers!" the Captain roared as yet another 100 anti ship missiles tore away from the ship.

"Energy discharge!" Halsey cried along with several officers as the screens went off of the scale on the readings.

"Hard to port! Activate!"

The 534 meter long heavy Frigate blasted itself onto a sudden new course as a dozen packs of crude yet true chemical propellants arranged along the flanks of the UNSC ship ignited as threw the warship out of the path of the streaking pulses of energy as John and

the crew nearly were pulled to the deck as the artificial gravity and inertial dampeners nearly overloaded from the sudden change in direction as they adjusted to compensate and keep John and the crew from being crushed by inhuman amounts of centrifugal force.

Although there was no way a ship could have actually dodged the near lightspeed bolts of hyperactive energy Captain Wallace had timed the discharge of the energy buildup perfectly and dodge right before they were fired, more of a stroke of luck than anything.

The Commonwealth lurched out of the way as 12 large blindingly bright pulses of plasma, gas and energy shot past the ship missing by mere yards in the most extreme case as setting off temperature spikes on the outer hull sensors.

The crew let out a brief cheer as the Captain immediately all but yelled.

"Fire the MAC!"

"Targeting now!"

On the holographic screens the targeting icon for the MAC drew a reticule right on the center of the Target, with a dotted line compensating for the need to lead the target due to the extreme range involved with space combat, even with a weapon that fired a slug at a small fraction of the speed of light.

The balance of the previously fired Archer Missiles expended themselves against the shields of the Imperial ship, forcing its pulse lasers to switch to a fast tracking firing mode in an attempt to decrease their number, only destroying two dozen as the missiles detonated their individual 3 megaton directed shaped charge fusion warhead.

The enemy's shields were still aglow as Wallace turned to the Weapons Ops.

"Fire!" Captain Wallace ordered.

The lights on the bridge dimmed and the Commonwealth shuddered. The MAC bolt launched through space—a red-hot metal slug moving at 8,000 kilometers per second.

The Imperial ship's engines flared to life and the ship veered away—Too late. The slug flashed across the distance like a comet in under four seconds.

The slug slammed into the target's prow.

The Imperial ship reeled backward through space. Its energy shields shimmered and glowed lightning bright and then vanished in a flash and electrical spark. The round, nearly unabated, continued and punched right through the ship, hitting the smaller engine block section just behind the thin connecting spar between it and the larger forward section.

The round went out the other side as it imparted its seven hundred and fifty megatons of TNT in kinetic energy, tearing the ship in a clean two pieces as the ship's central spar snapped like a twig in a

heavy wind as the engine block all but shattered and ceased to be while the remaining forward section of the ship tumbled through space helpless and with no control.

The bridge crew let out a roaring victory cheer.

"So that's what it takes to destroy one of those things?" the Captain whispered.

"I could have vaporized a UNSC Carrier with that much ordinance or leveled a continent, Christ I can only imagine their larger ships like that we found at Harvest."

"We know at least that our weapons can destroy them." Dr. Halsey said. The Captain stood straighter. "Best speed to the Damascus testing facility. We will execute a flyby orbit, and then proceed to a point twenty million kilometers distant to make repairs."

"Captain?" Dr. Halsey said. "A flyby?"

"I have orders to get you to the facility and retrieve whatever Section Three has stowed there, ma'am. As we fly by, a dropship will take you and your—" He glanced at John. "—"crew planet side. If a new Imperial Ship arrives in system, we will be the bait to lure them away."

"I understand, Captain."

"Be forewarned we they will probably be back to investigate the loss of one of their ships, and we would not last a minute against another one of those, let alone anything bigger."

"We'll rendezvous in orbit no later than 1900 hours."

Dr. Halsey turned to John. "We need to hurry. We don't have much time—"and there is a great deal I need to show the Spartans," she paused as she took a look at the tumbling form of the rather intact forward section of the destroyed Alien vessel, "And we need to get on that vessel and find anything we can about our enemy."

"Yes, ma'am," John said. He took a long look at the bridge, and hoped he never had to return.

****_PLEASE REVIEW_****

3. Chapter 3

******_****This story isnt as long as the previous chapters and is meant to introduce the MJOLNIR Suits and give a History lesson on this AU humanity and UNSC. The next chapter is where the real shooting starts.******

******And this is the last chapter that will use any significant context from The Fall of Reach, which is property of Halo and 343, which I dont own...and oh shit nearly forgot Star Wars, yup I defiantly dont own that, cause I wouldnt have fucked it up with the prequels.

****Enjoy!****

_November 8**__**th**__**, 2525**_**

Epsilon Erindani System****

Valiant Class Battlecruiser ****

UNSC Everest ****

Battlefleet X Ray****

"Latest update from FLEETCOM sir." One of the younger officers spoke with a hint of a crack in his voice as Admiral Preston James Cole took the holotab out of the young man's hands and nodded.

"Thanks son."

The man nodded and saluted. "Sir."

As the young officer briskly walked off to the side of the expansive bridge of the warship, Preston James Cole scrolled through the list on the data pad, going over the expansive list of the weapons, crew, fighters and ships under his command.

Fifty six warships not including his flagship.

Ten top of the line Marathon Heavy Cruisers. Eight older Halcyon Class Cruisers. Twelve of the fleet's new Midlothian Class Heavy Destroyers. Twenty Paris Class Heavy Frigates. An unprecedented Two Phoenix Class Assault ships which were converted colony ships loaded with a division of Marines apiece and three of the Navy's most sophisticated Prowlers that ONI possessed.

The last ship in his little Armada was just now leaving the space docks that when viewed from the planet Reach were so numerous that they looked like endless Constellations of stars.

An Atlas Class Carrier was a 1,650 meter long mass of fused composite Titanium A battleplating, engines and weapons ports. Carriers were the second largest ships ever built by human hands, second only to the fleet's three new and monstrous 1800 meter long Trafalgar Class "Super" carriers that were nearing completing within the year.

An angular beauty with uncompromising looks the majority of the ship's space was taken over by the Longsword Interceptor launch bays, so many in fact that each UNSC carrier was loaded with nearly 230 of the fighters and left little room for more than a Frigate's offensive weapons systems.

The ship pushed its way out of the Anchor 16 Space dock where it had been undergoing refitting and worked its way to the location of Admiral Cole's fleet in one of the planet Reach's multiple Lagrangian points on the far side of world and its two moons.

"UNSC Musashi is Thirty thousand clicks off of our port side sir. She is clearing Reach's secondary defense grid and Fleet perimeter now." The Everest's XO Emily Giles announced from her post at the fore of the Command center.

Cole looked out at the planet 150,000 kilometers distant on the large port side viewscreen.

Reach.

The fleet was on the side of the planet currently experiencing night time, allowing him to see the endless clusters of lights from cities and towns that covered the surface of the garden world and the line of lights extending up through the atmosphere that was the world's ten orbital elevators.

Located in the Epsilon Erindani star system, Reach was on Earth's metaphorical doorstep at a mere 10.5 lightyears, a trip which with the modern Slipspace drives of the UNSC would only take fourteen hours. Reach was slightly larger than Earth, having a diameter of 15,273 kilometers, compared to the 12,756 kilometers diameter of Earth, but 1.08 Gs was not a big difference.

The world and the three other colonies in the system had been settled in the first wave of expansion outside of the Sol system in 2221, and multiple probes had been sent to the system prior to the development of the Shaw Fjukawa Slipspace drive by the UEG and multiple Nation States before that by means of Nuclear Pulse Propulsion drives. Requiring a small degree of terraforming, the world grew over the centuries into the most powerful and populous of the UEG's and UNSC's colonies with nearly 3.6 Billion people. Reach was the most important headquarters for the United Nations Space Command outside of Earth and the main supplier in the colonies of military and civilian spacecraft outside of Earth and Mars, and the location of the UNSC's largest and most active shipyards outside of Sol. High Command, Fleet Command and the Marine Corps maintained headquarters on Reach, as well as many primary Naval Intelligence bases.

All those valuable resources and people needed defending, and the result was the single largest single permanent defensive fleet and forces in a single system aside from the gargantuan Home Fleet of Earth and Sol which dwarfed everything.

Two hundred and thirty warships, from dozens of the latest heavy Frigates, Destroyers, Halcyon Cruisers and Marathon Heavy Cruisers backed up by several Carrier groups and three of the _Everest's_ own class of Valiant type Battlecruisers. And that was simply the ships, not the rings of anti missile satellites and Surface to orbit Mass Drivers that dotted the world's military bases along with the Marine's Mobile Self Propelled Onager Mass Drivers.

Above Reach sat the recently completed and deadly looming forms of 40 Mark V Semi Mobile Super MAC Orbital Defensive Platforms, Defensive battlestations armed with a massive supersized Magnetic Accelerator Cannon with a length the size of a cruiser, capable of accelerating a 300 ton slug at an astonishing 70,000 kilometers _per second_ to lead to a kinetic energy release of 17.5 Gigatons of TNT per shot. Powered by gigantic underground Fusion Generators that transmitted the energy to the stations, as their much smaller generators on board we only used to power the secondary defensive batteries, Plasma Barriers and life support systems.

They could track and destroy enemy ships at ranges up to a colossal 280,000 kilometers limited only by the speed of which UNSC's X-Band sensors could track a target accurately without significant lag in

targeting. To think that there were five times their number in orbit of Earth was a sobering and comforting thought at the same time.

It was a terrifying invention that was the result of nearly a half century of war and insurrections among colonies disgruntled with the UEG's leadership that culminated in multiple systems and three dozen Outer Colonies and a dozen Inner Colonies out rightly seceding from the UNSC and UEG and forming their own military force and fleet out of the traitorous former counterpart of to the UNSC, the CMA, or Colonial Military Authority, calling themselves the United Rebel Front. During a 7 year period of pseudo cold war between the two the UNSC, being faced with the prospect of a real full scale war against an enemy with warships and armies, initiated the largest military expansion in human history. Weapons long having sat on drawing boards due to a lack of an enemy to use them against were finally developed and pressed into service. Defenses over Earth, Mars, Reach and countless other UNSC held worlds which had previously been small and relied usually on surface to orbit systems were upgraded and expanded with rings of defensive satellites and Super MAC ODP Battlestations as the old outmoded ships of the UNSC Fleet were scrapped and replaced with ships sporting MAC guns, huge batteries of the latest anti ship missiles and Railguns, the most advanced point defenses developed, even more powerful Plasma Barriers and thick Titanium A Composite Battleplate. New starfighters like the Longswords replaced the older models and the Marine Corps found themselves equipped with top of the line Powered Battlesuits, small arms, equipment, vehicles and enough of the newest Main Battle Tanks, Mobile Rail gun artillery and drones to give Generals wet dreams.

In 2510 war finally broke out, forever known as the Rebellion War.

The United Rebel Front launched an abortive assault on the Earth of the UNSC and Humanity. Earth.

For four days battles and skirmishes raged in the cold unforgiving vacuum in and around Earth's and Mar's orbits, causing significant casualties on both sides as dozens and dozens of ships from both sides and causing damage to the significant orbital works above Earth, Mars and in the stable orbits of the Lagrangian points. On top of that the entire city of New Dehli was left a smoldering hole. However the then vastly smaller UNSC Home Fleet was victorious and successfully defeated the URF Fleet. Seven years later two of the core worlds of the Rebellion were left a smoldering ruin after years of constant warfare over control of the planets and their respective systems. And entire Outer Colony world was left uninhabitable after Kinetic bombardment and nearly 100 million were left dead, but the UNSC stood victorious.

The Insurrection and terrorist groups were still operating, but after the UNSC and UEG initiated series of reforms many of the Rebellions lost their support, and the UNSC was left with a massive military that was still growing from projects and investments made during the war and with a military that was huge and with no one to fight.

Until now.

"Sir we are ready. All fighters accounted for and our slipspace drives are ready. All fighters and ships are docked and are reading

green sir." The _Everest's _fourth generation smart AI, Frost, whose avatar took the form of that of an amorphous snow flake whose voice was nearly asexual replied as his avatar flashed with lines of code, the result of calculating a FTL jump for the entire fleet.

Cole took one last look at Reach and the lights from endless lines of civilian ships and freighters in their strictly enforced shipping lanes and out to the twinkling small orbs of the other three heavily populated and defended colonies in the system, Tribute , Circumstance and Tantalus, millions of kilometers away.

Cole silently recited the age old Shepard's prayer, derived from a famous quote that slipped from the mouth of American Astronaut Alan Sheppard minutes before he lifted off on his primitive rocket in Florida in the mid 20th century to become the first American in space and the second human to enter the heavens during Mankind's first tentative steps into the stars.

"_Dear Lord, please don't let me fuck up_."

He had a career that was celebrated by the UNSC as the most decorated in modern history and had fought as a captain and commander on various UNSC warships on the frontline from the very beginning of the Insurrection thirty years ago through the hell of the Rebellion War and up until now.

Yet despite all of the medals on his Dress uniform in his cabin he felt as if all of that experience was near worthless against this new and deadly foe, despite the fact here he was, on a Valiant Class Battlecruiser no less, the most powerful ship in the UNSC armed with two Cruiser grade heavy MAC guns and a lighter MAC on its dorsal flank, three dual heavy railguns, a dozen dual railgun turrets and countless Missiles and other armaments along with three dozen Interceptors, leading the single most powerful Battlegroup in UNSC history to launch on an offensive.

Cole steeled himself and cleared his thoughts as he turned to the helm

"Set course for Harvest. Best Speed."

_**November 8**__**th**__**, 2525 (Military Calendar) **_

_**UNSC Damascus Materials Testing Facility, Planet Chi Ceti 4
**_

How far down was the testing facility? John and the other Spartans had been confined to a freight elevator for fifteen minutes, and the entire time it had been rapidly descending into the depths of Chi Ceti 4.

The last place John wanted to be was in another confined space.

The doors finally slid open, and they emerged in what appeared to be a well-lit hangar bay large enough to fit a dozen Longswords comfortably. The far end had an obstacle course set up with walls, trenches, dummy targets, and barbed wire along with simulated outdoors enviroments.

Three technicians and at least a dozen AI figures were busy in the

center of the room. John had seen AIs plenty of times, everyone did, yet no more than one at a time. Dã©jã had once told the Spartans that there were technical reasons why AIs couldn't be in the same place at the same time, but here were many ghostly figures: a mermaid, a samurai warrior, and one made entirely of bright light with comets trailing in her wake.

Dr. Halsey cleared her throat. The technicians turnedã€”the AIs vanished.

John had been so focused on the holograms that he hadn't noticed the forty Plexiglas mannequins set up in rows. On each was a suit of armor, powered armor.

The armor reminded John of the powered battlesuits Marines wore but much larger, clearly designed to fit the Spartan's larger size, and more advanced looking. He stepped closer to one and saw that the suit actually had multiple layers; the outer layer reflected the overhead lights with a faint green-gold iridescence. The clearly thick armor covered the groin, outer thighs, knees, shins, chest, shoulders, and forearms. There was a helmet and an integrated power packã€”smaller than standard Marine power suit's hydrogen fuel cells. Two hunches depressed into the back alongside the powerpack that looked like an integrated thruster pack. On the left hand shoulder built into the armor looked like a small built in weapons system, but what it fired he couldn't tell, along with the slight bulge on the armored left forearm. Underneath were intermeshed layers of matte-black metal and a third layer that peeked out in some places that was likely a carbon nano body suit.

"Project MJOLNIR," Dr. Halsey said. She snapped her fingers and an exploded holographic schematic of the armor appeared next to her.

"The armor's shell is a multilayer composite fused Titanium A alloy of remarkable strength. In testing it is five times stronger than armor on the most modern Marine and ODST battlesuits and can withstand numerous rounds from Electro thermal Assault Rifles, bursts of Gauss Rifle rounds, a moderate amount of heavier weapon fire and even resist against a fair amount of anti material rounds. We recently added a refractive coating to disperse incoming energy weapon attacksã€”to counter our new enemies." She pointed inside the schematic.

John and the Spartans nodded in approval. He was impressed so far.

The bulges on the back of the suit next to the power pack flashed on the hologram.

"Each suit has a built in thruster and booster system, not only allowing for movement and maneuvering in vacuum but also able to be used as a short term jet pack and as an impromptu rapid evasion system on the ground to quickly "boost" and evade enemy fire. They can simply be controlled by the user's active neural implant, thus one must simply activate it with his or her thoughts."

"Each battlesuit also has a gel-filled layer to regulate temperature; this layer can reactively change in density along with standard carbon nano fibers in the under lying suit. Against the skin of the

operator, there is a moisture-absorbing cloth suit, and biomonitors that constantly adjust the suit's temperature and fit. There's also an onboard computer that interfaces with your standard-issue neural implant."

Halsey continued as John watched all the more closely now as the hologram switched to show the small mount on the left shoulder of the suit, this hologram showing an armor that was slightly converted to accommodate for a female Spartan.

"This is an on board weapons mount, capable of acting as a grenade launcher and firing 30mm Smart Grenades, Flashbangs, EMP Grenades and even a single M-2MM Arrow 33mm Micro Guided Rocket Propelled Grenade capable of locking on to enemy infantry."

Now that is nice- John began to grin.

She gestured and the schematic collapsed so that it only displayed the outer layers. As the image changed, John glimpsed veinlike microcapillaries, a dense sandwich of optical crystal, a circulating pump, even what looked like a miniature fusion cell in the backpack.

"Due to advances in miniaturization we have finally succeeded in miniaturizing a fusion reactor that can be mounted with your suits, producing 12.4 times the power of a Marine M-51 Battlesuit's Hydrogen Pack. However aside from powering your larger suits, the energy is needed for our next innovation that I admit I am proud of." Halsey spoke with a very rare hint of pride as the strange bulge on the armored left fore arm lit up, this time the hologram showing a small emitter within the "bulge" quickly reveal itself.

"That, Spartans, is a fully functional _IN_ atmosphere personal Plasma Barrier."

That had John's attention.

How did they scale it down to fit in a suit? I thought the Marine's testing to fit one on a Grizzly Tank had failed several years ago. No less achieving making one work in atmosphere.

"Thanks to advances in the creation of magnetic fields, we can now contain a barrier of cold and hot Plasma within a standard atmosphere with the same effectiveness as in vacuum. As with every other Plasma Barrier it only covers one location at a time, and due to limitations of size there are only emitters on your forearm and back. In fitting it to the MJOLNIR's forearm it can simply be activated and used as a personal shield like a riot shield and due to its placement can be activated and used while the user is handling and aiming a firearm like so." Halsey continued as the video showed a MJOLNIR suit animation in a standard firing position, the location of the emitter allowing the user to have it activated and defending his or her front while comfortably firing a weapon.

"Also we have refined the suit's emitters to scale with the size of the weapon you are firing and is linked to your weapon so that it will allow a small hole in the screen for your fire to pass through. The barrier is linked up to the suit's threat tracker that we also adjusted to seek out energy weapons and electro-magnetic fields like plasma, so it will automatically turn on when it detects incoming

fire, although in the case of your forearm emitter it won't do you any good if your arm is to your side leaving your front exposed, so if you are caught in such a predicament you will have to either dodge or bring the emitter and barrier to bare."

The Spartans nodded yet again.

"Be reminded that while it can withstand sustained small to medium arms fire for a short period of time, enough hits or concentrated fire WILL overload the containment field, so it is still much better to avoid taking fire if you can."

John and the Spartans all nodded in unison as Halsey took in a breath to continue.

"Most importantly," Dr. Halsey said, "the armor's inner structure is composed of a new reactive metal liquid crystal. It is amorphous, yet fractally scales and amplifies force. In simplified terms, the armor triples the wearer's strength, and enhances the reaction speed of a normal human by a factor of five."

She waved her hand through the hologram. "There is one problem, however. This system is so reactive, far more so than any previous powered armor system, that our previous tests with unaugmented volunteers ended in—" She searched for the right word. "—failure." She nodded to one of the technicians.

A flat video appeared in the air. It showed a Marine officer, a Lieutenant, being fitted with the MJOLNIR armor. "Power is on," someone said from offscreen. "Move your right arm, please."

The soldier's arm blurred forward with incredible speed. The Marine's stoic expression collapsed into shock, surprise, and pain as his arm shattered. He convulsed—"shuddered and screamed. As he jerked in pain John could hear the sounds of bones breaking.

The man's own agony-induced spasms were killing him.

Halsey waved the video away. "Normal humans don't have the reaction time or strength required to drive this system," she explained. "You do. Your enhanced musculature and the metal and ceramic layers that have been bonded to your skeleton should be enough to allow you to harness the armor's power. There has been . . . insufficient computer modeling, however. There will be some risk. You'll have to move very slowly and deliberately until you get a feel for the armor and how it works. It cannot be powered down, nor can the response be scaled back. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Ma'am," the Spartans answered.

"Questions?"

John raised his hand. "When do we get to try them, Doctor?"

"Right now," she said. "Volunteers?"

Every Spartan raised a hand.

Dr. Halsey allowed herself a tiny smile. She surveyed them, and finally, she turned to John.

"You've always been lucky, John," she said. "Let's go."

He stepped forward. The technicians fitted him as the others watched and the pieces of the MJOLNIR system were assembled around his body. It was like a giant three-dimensional puzzle as the minutes ticked by.

"Please breathe normally," Dr. Halsey told him, "but otherwise remain absolutely still."

John held himself as motionless as he could. The armor shifted and melded to the contours of his form. It was like a second skin . . . and much lighter than he had thought it would be. It heated, then cooledâ€" then matched the temperature of his body. If he closed his eyes, he wouldn't have known he was encased.

They set the helmet over his head.

Health monitors, motion sensors, suit status indicators pulsed into life. A targeting reticle flickered on the heads-up display along with dozens of icons.

"Everyone move back," Halsey ordered.

The Spartansâ€"from their expressions, they were concerned for him, but still intensely curiousâ€"cleared a ring with a radius of three meters around him.

"Listen carefully to me, John," Dr. Halsey said. "I just want you to think, and only think, about moving your arm up to chest level. Stay relaxed."

He willed his arm to move, and his hand and forearm sprang forward to chest level. The slightest motion translated his thought to motion at lightning speed. It had been so fastâ€"if he hadn't been attached to his arm, he might have missed that it had happened at all.

The Spartans gasped.

Sam applauded. Even lightning-fast Kelly seemed impressed.

Dr. Halsey slowly coached John through the basics of walking and gradually built up the speed and complexity of his motions. After fifteen minutes he could walk, run, and jump almost without thinking of the difference between suit motion and normal motion.

"Petty Officer, run through the obstacle course," Dr. Halsey said. "We will proceed to fit the other Spartans. We don't have a great deal of time left."

John snapped a salute without thinking. His hand bounced off his helmet and a dull ache throbbed in his If his bones hadn't been reinforced, he knew they would have been pulverized.

"Carefully, Petty Officer. Very carefully, please."

"Yes, ma'am!"

John focused his mind on motion as he proceeded through the vast

indoors obstacle course.

Over the next several minutes He leaped over a four-meter-high wall with ease and distance to spare. He punched at reinforced concrete targetsâ€”shattering them. He threw knives, sinking them up to their hafts into target dummies nearly 30 meters away. He ran a 200 meter dash at speeds nearing 40 miles an hour. Testing the suit's built in boosters he dodged and jetted out of the path of simulated holographic missiles in a blur of speed and faint exhaust plume from the boosters. He slid under barbed wire as bullets from targeting auto turrets zinged over his head. He stood, and let the rounds deflect off the armor like they were nothing more than raindrops.

John then activated the Plasma Barrier, which with a strange flash of gas, light and electricity immediately morphed into a rectangular wall of reddish energy as the air closest to the inch thick containment of superhot gas and energy heated, shimmering and causing the temperature readings outside of his suit to rise by a couple of degrees.

John marveled at it before he went to work practicing how to use it with various weapons and when able to angle it so fire was deflected, although he learned the hard way of Halsey's warning that it was not able to take sustained or heavy weapons fire as it collapsed on him once.

To his amazement, his adrenaline boost, which he and the others were starting to call Spartan Time, kicked in as the world seem to move at a fraction of its former speed as John's augmented vision actually watched and tracked several of the rounds as he side stepped and spun away in a blur of in-human speed as the projectiles sailed through the empty space where he had just been.

He had just dodged a burst of gunfire.

That achievement still hadn't dawned on him fully as Halsey's voice simply came in through the com link.

"Good job John. You should only get faster and better at that."

John was still slightly bewildered as he replied with an unnecessary nod.

"Yes ma'am."

Soon the other Spartans joined him on the course. Everyone ran awkwardly through the obstacles, though they had no coordination.

John expressed his worries to Dr. Halsey. "It will come to you soon enough. You've already received some subliminal training during your last cryo sleepâ€”" Dr. Halsey told them, "â€”now all you need is time to get used to the suits."

More worrisome to John was the realization that they'd have to learn how to work together all over again. Their usual hand signals were too exaggerated nowâ€”a slight wave or tremble translated into fullforce punches or uncontrolled vibrations. They would have to use the COM channels for the time being.

As soon as he thought of this, his suit tagged and monitored the other MJOLNIR suits. Their standard issue UNSC neural chipâ€”implanted in every UNSC soldier at inductionâ€”identified friendly soldiers and displayed them on their helmet HUDs. But this was differentâ€”all he had to do was concentrate on them, and a secure COM channel opened. It was extremely efficient.

And much to his relief, after drilling for thirty minutes, the Spartans had recovered all of their original group coordination, and more.

On one level, John moved the suit and, in return, it moved him. On another level, however, communication with his squad was so easy and natural, he could move and direct them as if they were an extension of his body.

Over the hangar's speakers, the Spartans heard Dr. Halsey's voice: "Spartans, so far so good. If anyone is experiencing difficulties with the suit or its controls, please report in."

"I think I'm in love," Sam replied. "Ohâ€”sorry, ma'am. I didn't think that was an open channel."

"Flawless amplification of speed and power," Kelly said. "It's like I've been training in this suit for years."

"Do we get to keep them?" John asked.

"You're the only ones who can use them, Petty Officer. Who else could we give them to? Weâ€”" A technician handed her a headset. "One moment, please. Report, Captain."

Captain Wallace's voice broke over the COM channels. "We have contact with a second Imperial Ship. Profile reads as nearly the same as the one before. ma'am. And it is holding at Extreme range. They have been on the edge of the system and are now looking for their friends as they are scanning in high frequencies and lighting up the local space. We are moving behind the planet's moon in order to mask our profile. We can't take another one of them head on or possibly at all with our current shape and damage after the last fight. They are moving toward the planet via normal space."

"Your repair status?" she asked.

"Long-range communications inoperable. Slipstream generators offline. MAC system is online but we have to show ourselves in order to get a shot. We could possibly pull it off but our chances of success is extremely low. 20 Percent of our Archers fusion Missiles have been depleted with another 30 percent of them lost due to damage or destruction of their pods. And less I say we have multiple hull breaches and armor depleted on multiple sections. Our Plasma Barrier Emitter is nearly offline."

There was a long hiss of static. "If you need more time . . . I can try and draw them away."

"No, Captain," she replied, and carefully scrutinized John and the other armored Spartans. "We're going to have to fight them . . . and this time we have to win."

"However Captain you could draw them in for us. Our Spartans are going to take that ship."

There was a long several seconds of static on the other end.

****I LIKE REVIEWS! I LIKE TO KNOW THE READERS OPINIONS. SO PLEASE REVIEW!****

4. Chapter 4

****Authors Note- ****This story is also on Spacebattles with some technical discussion if you want to know a bit more about some creative designs etc.

The UNSC Marine armor in this fic is essentially the Power Armor found in the movie (don't watch it) Starship Troopers Invasion. First off I hate anime but that armor design is the coolest and most realistic that I have seen so far, thus that is what the UNSC Marines in my fic have.

The armament of the UNSC Longswords has been revised slightly as is their size (now the smaller versions seen in Halo Reach.) So ****please** don't tell me that they are different and not cannon. I know******. The inclusion of the primary anti ship weapon of the Longswords is not only my way of addressing why the UNSC has a large Interceptor but also in my mind is the only way a fighter in this Universe (and the normal Halo Universe) can be successful at attacking enemy warships which have such ridiculous Point Defenses.

Planet Harvest****

_November 9**__**th**__**, 2525 (UNSC Calender)**_**

2 ABY****

"I've got enemy soldiers in the ruins of that homestead. Eyes on four of them. Armed with projectile weapons." One Nine said as his voice came through the speakers inside of Alpha 956's helmet as he and his fellow squad of ten stormtroopers picked their way through the rubble that was the outskirts of the city which was currently occupied by the growing Imperial forces that were hunkered down under the protective bubble of a deployed energy shield that nearly covered the 10 mile radius of the city.

If Thrawn wasn't already serious enough about the defenses as soon as the Helmsmans contingent of troops had been added to the nearly 60,000 strong force a battery of eight surface to orbit turbo-lasers were quickly being built to afford a protection from whatever ships this UNSC might send.

If one thing was for certain, Thrawn wanted this planet taken for the long haul.

But the small remnants of the natives defense forces were doing their best to resist the Imperial warmachine. And though he wouldn't admit it to his superiors, 956 had to give them credit that they had put up a stiff resistance for their small numbers and weaponry.

After seeing the decimation of three platoons worth of stormtroopers and AT-STs in an attack and hearing of what the defenders had managed to do to the forces that had arrived in the system before he had aboard the Helmsman, he didn't scoff personally at the native's use of Projectile weapons anymore, after seeing those weapons punch through Stormtrooper armor with little trouble to kill and maim the soldier within more than enough times he didn't take them for granted like his stupid officers tended to.

"_They would change their mind real quick when they started shooting at them_" he thought to himself as he shuffled past an abandoned wheeled personal vehicle left out on the deserted street, doing his best to stay hidden as his eyepiece HUDs tracked the environment around him and designated the objective.

The other ten troopers followed suit as 956 crawled into a set of ruins of a wall that ran by the homestead that the enemy was in.

"The Droid cam is up, nothing else in the area so far as I can tell, these krimps must be performing recon." One Nine spoke as the lead sergeant with his orange pauldron crawled along the rubble, more than likely out of the enemy's line of sight.

However despite the Troopers stealth 956 knew that he and the Stormtroopers would have to go loud to take them out due to the position of the homestead and it having a rather large yard, but a well placed thermal detonator would do the trick in one go.

How the hell they had managed to sneak past all the other dozens of much larger patrols and Tie Interceptors providing CAP above the city he didn't know, but it wouldn't matter.

He would much prefer to do the job himself than to simply call in for a quick strafing run of Blaster Cannon fire or one of the roving bands of AT-STs and 2M-1 Hovertanks, but in the case of all those options the squad had been a little too close to the target should a Blaster Cannon round accidentally hit them too.

"Everyone set up, we cant get near the place thanks to that open yard, provide suppressing fire for five of us to get around back and lob a couple of Dets in their and burn them out."

"Yes sir." The Troopers all replied as one as 956 readied his trusty E-11 Blaster Carbine.

Taking position behind the cover of the low wall he looked towards One Nine as the Sergeant counted down.

"Three."

The excitement of combat kicked in as he felt a surge of adrenaline, as the more rational part of his mind remembered his Training on Cardia.

"Two"

"One"

"Open Fire!" One nine shouted through the Squad Com.

His heart pounding in his chest 956 popped up out of cover searching for targets as his Blaster came to his firing position.

A brief shout of warning from the enemy came from inside of the house as a fusillade of crimson blaster bolts tore into the front façade of the house, blowing huge chunks out of the concrete like material and punching right through the windows as the other five troopers burst from cover to run full tilt towards the side of the house and flank it.

956 saw a flurry of movement from inside of the house as he spun his sights onto the target.

Too late.

Two cracks and two orange flashes from the assailant's projectile rifle lashed out against the wine of energy weapons.

However that didn't save the UNSC trooper as Five Six bulled the trigger on his E-11 twice, sending two red bolts of energy and gas into the silhouette through the haze and into the house, hitting the enemy square in the chest both times as a brief scream emitted from the enemy trooper as he fell to the floor with two burning holes in his chest and his fatigues on fire, dead before he hit the floor and out of sight.

Five six was about to grin inside of his helmet until he turned to see that sprawled on the grass of the lawn just short of cover was the trailing Stormtrooper of the five that flanked the homestead, with a hole through his helmet and brain matter and gore exploding out of the top of the head, spilling onto the lawn. The first round had hit the deceased trooper square in the chest, denting and deforming the white plastoid armor inward and cracking it, but stopping the round.

The same could not be said for the armor's effectiveness against a shot to the face.

Just to see how a slugthrower could damage Stormtrooper armor like that went against traditional thinking that slugthrowers were useless antiques of primitive worlds, no less the round that split the troopers head open like a melon after punching through the poor man's helmet.

"Move up! Smoke them out!" One Nine shouted as he and the others advanced still laying down blaster fire that had now thoroughly reduced the entire front of the homestead into a molten mass of debris and ozone as several small fires erupted within.

Moving up to the front door One Nine and the others stacked up as 956's IFF tagged all of the friendlies in blue on his Eyepiece's HUD.

"Move in."

The Stormtrooper just in front of Five Six moved and with a powerful kick from his slightly augmented armored leg kicked down the wooden door with a crash as leveled his rifle searching for targets as he moved in and to the side to allow those behind him a shot and to file

in.

Before he could take one more step in a trio of cracks from within the house and down the long entry hallway barked and the Stormtrooper's torso withered for a second as the Trooper's dying reaction sent two unaimed bolts down the hallway before he fell to the floor dead with a dented and punctured chest plate.

The one well defined hole was right where his heart would be as blood oozed out of it.

"Kryfff!" One Nine screamed as the other troopers swore a stream of curses and sent a flurry of Blaster fire down the hall way in return.

Still firing down the hallway the UNSC soldiers popped back out of their cover and returned fire, forcing Fifty Six to jump over the body of his fallen comrade as projectiles tore past him and punched holes in the walls, going right through them unabated.

"Frak!" Fifty six swore as he and the two other Stormtroopers with him again fired down the hallway, filling it with debris and ozone as One Nine pulled the fallen trooper out of the doorway.

Both sides seemed to dance in and out of cover taking potshots at one another, unable to hit each other as both sides had cover.

Five Six finally popped spun out of cover and readied his blaster just as the UNSC trooper popped out of his cover with a long and unfamiliar looking projectile carbine like rifle in his hands ready to put a slug through him.

Five Six was faster.

He pulled the trigger twice as two blood red blasts turned the man's face into a flaming crater of blood and bone as the enemy soldier's limp body in its odd armored fatigues crashed to the ground.

Five six did not have time to be satisfied with his kill as the other two enemies returned fire in an attempt to avenge their comrade, one shouting insults in a strange version of basic as supersonic projectiles ripped through the air around and towards him as he dove out of the way back into the cover behind the wall.

He wasn't quite fast enough as one bullet struck him on his right shoulder, spinning him around as he grunted in surprise and pain, nearly tumbling to the floor as he looked at his shoulder pauldron, half expecting to see that his arm was now gone.

The armor actually stopped the bullet, but the plastoid was warped to a surprising degree and visibly cracked, certainly not able to take a hit from those weapons again if he got hit there. His shoulder beneath the armor and body glove ached and burned with pain, more than likely a cracked bone as he gritted the pain away underneath his helmet and rejoined the fight.

More cracks of projectile rifles and the whine of blasterfire filled the homestead as the other Troopers filed in and added their fire into the fray.

The second and third UNSC Trooper were soon cut down by red bolts of energy ripping them open by One Nine and another trooper as the trio of Stormtroopers, the most feared soldiers in the known galaxy, nodded and began clearing the house room by room, the troopers always checking their corners and ready for anything that needed a bolt put in it.

"Clear!"

"Clear!"

Blaster fire and the still unfamiliar cracks of projectile fire cut through the air this time from the rear of the house as a firefight between the remaining enemy soldiers and the four Stormtroopers whom went around to flank from the rear of the structure broke out.

He and the other troopers with him hurried up their pace as the trio of Imperial soldiers covered their lines of fire while checking the rooms along the way, moving to try and catch the enemy from behind.

As Five six turned a corner to another unlit hallway more bullets sailed past his head as he dove back into cover, the slugs chewing apart the wall around and above him as his squad comm crackled to life.

"_Detonator out!_"

The familiar brief thud of the red ball of the energy grenade hitting the floor down the hall happened as several shouts of surprise could be heard as Five six and the others kept their backs to the wall.

A second later the Nuclear Fusion grenade's explosive field activated as the tremendous heat from the blast atomized and vaporized anything within the 6 meter blast radius.

The reaction lasted merely a second before dissipating as the smell of ozone and smoke filled the air only to be filtered by the Stormtroopers helmets as Five Six and the others turned around the corner and advanced into the smoke, Blasters ready and Eye pieces switched to thermal modes.

There was simply nothing left of the enemy soldier's bodies.

"Clear!" He shouted as the other Troopers grouped on his position.

One Nine came up and took in the scene, nodding for a second as five six bent down to look at the remains of the enemy soldiers.

They wore a light tan body armor uniform that covered most of their torso and arms as well as their thighs that was complete with a no frills looking helmet that had a now shattered visor section with a holographic display.

Function over form.

As the other troopers milled about making sure their position was secure he found a still intact enemy weapon, the projectile carbine

that had just recently been shooting at them.

Picking it up he eyed it with his military eye.

It was lighter than he was expecting, yet also durable feeling. It had a pullup style layout as he managed to find an eject button as the power cell- no- slug magazine clattered to the floor.

He stooped to pick it up. The rounds were shockingly smaller than he was expecting, and looked much more developed than any slug thrower he had been used to with a deadly looking silver slug at the tip of the round waiting to be launched.

"For a primitive weapons system it can pack a punch. The Verpines would be impressed." One nine spoke as he came up from behind.

"Command is sending an APC to pick us up and investigate. They will be here soon so if you plan on taking a souvenir I suggest you do so now."

**Planet Harvest**

** One Mile Away**

"Fuck!" Bryne cursed as the radio link with the Colonial Guard squad finally went dead.

Turning his armored head to face Avery and Jenkins the hardened Marine's stare seemed to penetrate Avery's Power suit nonetheless.

"Are we still going to do this? Those Colonial Guardsmen couldn't even get near as close as we have to, and our part of the plan is a lot more stupid."

Avery inwardly sighed.

He, PFC Jenkins, Bryne and another one of the surviving Marines named Lee had decided that their last ditch plan to take out the Imperials and get inside of their fortress.

Five days ago the Imps had raised what could only be a full blown energy shield over the central core of Upgard and had been growing their base within daily. Defensive towers bristling with weapons emplacements and turrets were rising among the battered skyline of the formerly proud capitol city within and outside of the shield "bubble" and to Avery's and the others amazement slow moving vehicles and aircraft could pass right through unharmed.

With that being the case, Avery hatched up the idea to use their last high explosive that they had manage to grab during the evacuation of the primary defense base, a B-88 Infantry Level Small Diameter Nuclear Fission Bomb, better known as the Nuclear football, which was currently strapped to the back of Bryne's power suit.

If they could detonate the nuke inside of that shield, even the mere 10 kiloton, low radiation "clean" nuke could annihilate the enemy base if that shield contained the blast wave like he believed it would.

However that had required them to get in close, which meant the three other Marines loaded up with the last of their ammunition and several captured "blasters" would sneak through the vast numbers of enemy patrols in and around the city and if necessary fight their way through.

It was a desperate plan more than any, as their food supplies were starting to run low, so low to the point that the few Imperial prisoners they had managed to capture had been killed in order to save the food necessary to feed the human prisoners.

Human prisoners.

Avery still after two weeks was having a hard time grasping his mind around the information and realization that a gigantic unknown Human Empire, separate from the UNSC, existed and was in acquisition of technology more advanced than the UNSC had.

Though he seriously doubted some of the more ridiculous claims of the _Empire's_ size as some of the more arrogant Imperials had claimed.

However in order to get this close Avery and Bryne had decided that a team of Colonial Guard Soldiers would have to sneak into the city and try recon the area in front of them so they could more easily avoid patrols, as it appeared that so far the Empire couldn't pick up their encrypted radio signals.

However that had clearly lead to their demise, as a lucky band of "Stormtroopers" had spotted their position.

Six Colonial Guard soldiers were dead now, their weapons and equipment no match for the Imperials and taken by surprise.

The Colonial Guard and the UNSC Army received only piecemeal funding and equipment compared to the Marines, a result which left the Marines with much better equipment like the Power suit he wore.

Avery gritted his teeth as one of the strange H shaped Imperial fighters screamed overhead, shaking the roof of the three story building he was perched on.

"Johnson, as bad as the loss of those men are it does give us an opportunity." Bryne commented as an Imperial floating APC, a rectangular box of a thing with a turreted medium sized cannon on top, floated to a stop in front of the homestead as several more Imperial soldiers got out of the vehicle as the enemy soldiers exited the now cleared homestead as Avery watched through the SR-99's Oracle scope.

"You have an idea?" Avery asked with a hint of humor.

"Hand me that mobile jammer"

**Five Minutes Later**

"_We are in position." _Bryne's voice noted calmly in Avery's ear as he switched his helmet's cams to VISR mode, zooming in on the other

Marines IFF beacons as the three Marines shuffled with silent trained precision in their fully armored power armor behind the cover of yet another once inhabited building that lined the avenue.

"Ill take the first shot, taking that officer out and that Stormtrooper with the orange shoulder pauldron, that has to be their sergeants."

"Affirmative, take the shot and we will cut their comms."

Avery shifted slightly as his armor's small servos whirled as he placed his armored visor against the Oracle scope.

Along the readouts of the SR-99 rifle the laser guided marker on the scope came to life and connected to the first round in the chamber.

"_Round activated. Select Target_" the center of the scope flashed as Avery set the laser designator on the center of mass of the Imperial officer who was overlooking the removal and "disposal" of the Colonial Guardsmen's bodies and gear as the olive drab uniformed man stood arrogantly outside of the floating APC directing the stormtrooper's work.

He pressed the button on the side of the rifle as he settled is scope on his second target, the Pauldroned stormtrooper as he and the rifle's computer accounted for the drop in the round and the wind, factors that at a range of one mile that he would not have had to worry about with a typical M-99 Stanchion Gauss Sniper Rilfe, but then again he was firing a massive 14.9 mm Fin stabilized _guided_ round.

"_Target Locked_"

Avery glet loose a small predatory grin.

"Initiate." He spoke on the comm as he pulled the trigger.

The rifle's stock bucked against his armored shoulder as he pulled the trigger a second time.

The first round, while aimed at the Imperial trooper, after escaping the barrel , ever so slightly adjusting its course with the small fins that revealed themselves after the sabot casing came apart.

The round turned curved in flight to hit the designated target its small microchip had recorded.

And it did.

The Imperial officer's mid section completely disappeared in a cloud of gore as the massive 14.9 millimeter slug passed through it.

At the same time Avery's second shot, this one unguided, also flew true, and struck the targeted Orange Pauldroned Stormtrooper in the lower torso, passing through the white armor unhindered and creating a grizzly mess of the person inside.

Just as Avery's bullets cut the Imperial Officer in two, Bryne, with the two other Marines, having snuck in close while trying to avoid

any possible sensors, activated the very short ranged jammer that Jenkins had been carrying, blocking all outgoing communications as the Marines opened up just as the Imperials began to scramble for cover.

Bryne, firing from a window, emerged and fired his ARC-920 rail rifle, the, 16 mm x 65 mm slug hitting the turret atop of the APC, punching right through the small turret to shatter and explode its compound reactant core inside the mount and knocking the heavy weapon out before it could potentially turn the Marines surprise attack into a slaughter.

The other two Marines, Jenkins and Lee, spun around from behind their cover to spray the backs of the Imperials across the street with electro-thermally fired hypervelocity slugs from their MA6's as three Stormtroopers were cut down.

Just as Avery's rifle spoke again, taking yet another Imperial out of the fight for good, the disorganized troopers returned fire with their Blasters as blood red bolts of energy lanced towards the Marine's position, forcing Jenkins and Lee back into cover as Bryne switched to his SAW and sent a roaring burst of 9mm armor piercing rounds into the Imperials cover as they dove back behind the low lying wall they had used to attack the Guardsmen.

However one of them still was not fast enough as the larger projectiles dented, punched, and tore through the plastoid armor.

The Marines slowly advanced as with burst of his SAW Bryne kept the Imperials heads down as rounds began to chew away and in cases punch through the thick concrete wall.

Avery, having now lost his line of sight, decided that he needed to risk being seen out in the open as he placed the SR-99 on his M-51 Armored suit's back magnetic strip, pulled out his MA6 and leapt off of the roof of the three story building.

He landed with a thud as the armor's servos made the drop seem like nothing and ran as fast as his legs enhanced by the armor could move towards the firefight, moving to the cover of the buildings as he crashed through a small house with his rifle always at the ready.

Harvest

Five six cursed as he threw himself back down into cover as another snarling burst from the armored soldiers' weapon tore through the air where he just was as two others actually punched through the top of the concrete wall turning it into powder.

"Firefik we are pinned down and still nothing on the Comms! They are jamming us somehow!" one of the four remaining Stormtroopers shouted over the comms as Fix Angrily fired a couple of blind shots from his E-11 at the enemy not 20 meters away only to quickly yank his arm back down before another short burst cut through the air.

Five six was about to sneak another shot at the enemy as a low _thump_ sound could be heard just before the fifth surviving Stormtrooper who was in cover behind another section of the wall

separate from his was covered in fire as an explosive detonated right over his position, revealing when the smoke cleared revealed the trooper limp on the ground, his armor dented and punctured from shrapnel wounds all over his body.

"Any det's left!?" Five six shouted with anxiety as another burst of fire cut away at his cover.

"One!" another trooper replied.

"Well use it!" Five six shouted as the Trooper nodded and hurled the explosive over the wall.

"Move up and shoot our way out! Get to a new position!" another trooper shouted as the Stormtroopers, their training kicking in, moved as a unit that had not lost its leader.

The concussive force and heat of the Thermal Detonator's blast tore through the air as Five six stood up with his Blaster Carbine at the ready and searching for targets as the other troopers followed suit.

The smoke from the blast still filled the street as he found one of the closer assailants spinning from out of their cover.

He finally got a good look at them as he brought his sights to bare.

They were armored from head to toe in a slightly bulky but still flexible in appearance suit of tanned colored armor with their faces hid behind a fully enclosed armored helmet not unlike a Troopers. In the enemy soldier's hands was an odd but sleek looking projectile weapon with three barrels arranged in a triangle within a barrel shroud. That was an unusual projectile system to say the least. Under that was another larger single barrel that he could only surmise was a launcher.

He pulled the trigger on his E-11 twice as he began to move to the direction of a hopefully much safe cover of a nearby house.

The two bolts hit the UNSC Soldier square in the chest, slamming the soldier back against the wall as the armored enemy stumbled back a step from the impact with two burning marks on its chest plate.

However to Five Six's surprise the UNSC Soldier, instead of falling to the ground, put the weapon back to his shoulder and fired back, only phased and most likely slightly wounded as Five Six tried to dive out of the way while the other Troopers fired in the direction of the other UNSC soldiers, keeping them pinned down as they made a move for a new position.

However Alpha Nine Five Six was too slow as one of the bullets hit his already damaged right shoulder plate, and went right through it this time.

He spun to the ground trying his best not to shout in pain over the comms as the firefight still raged around him, his arm useless as his E-11 clattered away out of reach.

He didn't even know the extent of his injury as he began to black out from the pain, only hearing the climax of the battle through his comm set.

Bryne and Lee had by this point recovered and sent well aimed bursts of fire at the Imperials, whose somewhat suprising attempt at a counterattack had nearly caught the veteran Marine in the fireball of those infernal grenades as he managed to dive out of the way.

The remaining three Stormtroopers were simply cut down before they could make it to their cover.

Silence yet again overcame the sector of the city.

Bryne turned to Jenkins as he raced to the stricken Marine, who had slouched against the wall behind him.

"Are you alright kid?" he asked as his suit's scanners pulled up the status of the Marine's Power Suit.

"Yeah Im alright, it knocked the wind out of me and Im sure as hell burned on my chest, just let the Bio foam injectors kick in and Ill be good." Jenkins breathed as Bryne nodded, the Marine loading his last Programmable 35mm Airburst Grenade into his MA6's underbarrel Grenade Launcher .

The armor had held, but barely. Two smoking near crater like impact sites clearly indicated where the man had been hit. The suit was breached likely and could take a hit in the area again, but it still did the job and worked still. Gone were the days where it took all but heavy weapons fire to kill a Marine in combat.

Those Energy Weapons , or plasma weapons or whatever they were called packed a punch.

Bryne looked to the one he had taken off of an Imp a week ago that was strapped to his thigh plate. At least it would do the job when he ran out of ammo.

A new contact, a friendly blue icon, appeared on the motion and Radar tracker on the top of his HUD as Bryne turned just in time to see Avery burst through a side door of an adjacent house with is weapon at the ready.

"You're late Avery. We are clear." Bryne chided as the Sergeant let out a muttering of curses while walking towards the group.

Johnson nodded to the Imperial APC, settled on the ground driverless.

"You get me a nice ride?"

"Only if you don't fuck up my insurance premiums." Bryne retorted.

**Ceti Cheti System.**

**Approaching Hostile "UNSC Colony" **

**Imperial Nebulon B Frigate Dark Watch**

"Scanners Are not picking up anything of the _Repuslor_. All we have left are a debris cloud that matches the composition of the hull of a Nebulon B Frigate." The senior scanner officer replied as the man turned around in his seat at his station to face Commander Renad

Aged Thirty Four and only a recent graduate from the Imperial Starfleet Academy, Renad was none the less concerned.

"Then that means they are gone and that's what is left of them. Full sensor sweep again. We need to find what the hell managed to take them out. Shields up and get our TIE's ready. I want to be ready for anything that can beâ€¦" the commander was interrupted by an alarm on the sensor officer's consol.

"I have a contact! Moving to behind the moon, range three hundred thousand, and I think it is launching fighters!" the man needlessly shouted.

"Im right here." Renad noted aloud.

"Launch our fighters and take us in. All guns prepped for battle. Battle Stations!"

**GA-TL1 Longsword Class Interceptor **

**Knife-8**

"Alright boys full burn for thirty seconds and prepare for target lock. I've got them on the edge of my envelope. Range Three thousand kilometers and closing. In effective accurate weapon's range at 1000 kilometers. ETA 15 seconds. Twenty four contacts. Radar visual coming in." The Squadron leader of the _Commonwealth's_ six on board Longsword Interceptors, Lt. Alexi, or Knife-9, commanded over the squadron comms as Lt. Morgan Fey gripped her controls of her Longsword with anxiety.

"God these fighters are fucking weird looking. What they fuck are those? Radiators? They cant be solar panels." Her Co-pilot, 2nd Lieutenant Houchou Fuun spoke aloud as he worked the primary sensor systems and the main gun.

The Longsword shook and vibrated under her as the gravitationa forces were pressed on her body through her state of the art flight suit, the weak gravity plating and the far more important inertial dampeners working overtime as she throttled the 30 meter long and 40 meter wide sharp wedge shaped dark grey interceptor's twin nuclear powered fusion boosted engines to their maximum speed, enough that were it not for the inertial dampeners a sudden maximum acceleration burn would crush her and Fuun in seconds.

Fey kept her attention laser focused on the view screen in front of her as the stars spun around her on the viewscreens.

"Range two thousand. Arming weapons. Begin maneuvers." The flight lead announced as the Longswords, flying in a loose wedge formation with half a mile in between in craft and separated into three pairs, began jinking towards every direction rapidly as they still approached the enemy fighters at breakneck speeds, never flying

_directly _towards the enemy.

"50 mm Helilical Railguns check, main guns green. AGSM-10 Fusion Missiles check. Green. AGSM-8 Missile pods check. Green. M-67 Micro MAC Gun check, charged and chambered, 10 round charge ready. Plasma Barrier is up, covering our 12' o'clock. " Her copilot sounded off.

The Longswords were equipped with a full anti fighter and ship loardout, with two anti fighter missile pods instead of the normal one and the anti missile pulse laser meant for missile interception duties.

If they could get through this hopeless looking situation of being outnumbered four to one, and if that Imperial ship's point defenses and shields proved to be too much for the heavily armed Longswords anti-ship AGM-10s nuclear warheads the M-67 Micro MAC was the last thing that could be effective, especially as it was a UNSC fighter's primary weapon against ships.

In an age where point defenses of warships were devastatingly effective, from the traditional 50mm Helilical Railgun CIWS whose range was several thousand miles to any human warship's point defense lasers that could hole a lightly armored fighter from thousands of miles away in seconds and would zap missiles out of the sky, coupled with ever more powerful Plasma Barriers nothing short of swarms of single ships would have any effect on any respectably armed human warship. Something the UNSC had learned during the early years of the Insurrection the hard way before the rapid "Cold War" and arms race that led up to the Rebellion war with the United Rebel Front and its former secessionary star systems.

As a result the UNSC turned to the arming of "Micro MACs" onto its fighters. This allowed UNSC fighters to engage at longer ranges and snipe the hardpoints of Rebellion and enemy ships, usually from multiple vectors at a time to overcome powerful Plasma Barriers with a squadron to either destroy the vessel or damage its point defenses enough to allow the much more powerful anti shipping missiles a better chance to hit the enemy.

Although it didn't pack anything remotely like its larger cousin and the secondary railguns of UNSC ships in terms of firepower, a 140mm slug that weighed 80 kilograms traveling at 600 kilometers per second still would do tremendous damage against "softpoints" of enemy ships, 3.4 kilotons of TNT in kinetic energy on impact.

That was the plan for this op, which she thought was crazy, but luckily Captain Wallace had ordered them to try and destroy the alien vessel first if they could, only to try and open it up if they couldn't destroy it without suffering the loss of the whole squadron.

Of course that was if they could get through this wave of smaller and strange H shaped Alien fighters.

"They are fast, but their squadron is incredibly tight. Lock on missiles." Lt. Alexi calmly ordered as Fey, her senses laser focused, flipped on her multi dimensional X-Band radar.

The AGSM-10 missiles, stored in their pods in the two main weapons

bays on either side of the Mini Mac that was underslung along the length of the fuselage and hugging its belly, locked on nearly immediately the large Radar and Thermal profile of the alien fighters.

"I've got lock! Range 1,000 and closing fast, we've got seconds! Fire Fire Fire!" Lt. Alexi shouted over the comms as Fey grinned.

Three of the alien fighters had red lock on icons over their normally green outlined box.

"Firing!" she shouted as he pressed the firing stud on the top of her flight stick and the neural uplink that connected her to the fighter ran a swift verification code that took under a second before the twin missile pods popped out of their bay and launched three anti fighter missiles.

Three bluish contrails of ion engine missiles shot away from her fighter at surprising speed and joined the other 18 missiles as they tore across the rapidly closing distance.

The alien fighters detected the attack and promptly went evasive, spreading out their formation as several performed snap rolls and began performing wild maneuvers in attempting to throw off the missiles.

"Split up into pairs! Flank them from above and the sides! Force them into grouping back together! Prepare for Zero G snap maneuvers!" Alexi ordered as the Longsword's pilots split up and threw their fighters onto new courses with blasts from maneuvering thrusters and their main engines vectored thrust.

Just in time for the Imperial fighters to close into the very edge of visual range as the missiles struck.

Of the eighteen missiles twelve found their targets as six missed and flew aimlessly into the void.

The flash of "***Target Destroyed**" appeared at the top of Fey's HUD as two of her missiles found their targets, enveloping the smaller H shaped fighters in overpowering explosions meant to take out much larger craft and simply shattering them.

"No shields repeat no shields! They don't have them on their fighters!" one Longsword pilot shouted as the explosive clouds quickly died in the vacuum of space leaving only the small debris clouds that kept moving all the same with nothing to stop them.

As hoped the twelve reaming fighters briefly bunched up and began to turn to track the three pairs of UNSC Interceptors.

"Track 'em. Fire at will! Engage at your discretion." Alexi ordered as the range had now dropped to point blank.

Dogfighting range.

Fey cut thrust in her port engine and reversed it with her rudders and neaural uplink as the Longsword spun on its axis to track the four enemy fighters that were on her and her wingman's 9 o'clock hoping to flank them.

The Longsword spun around her as a grueling 18 G's of gravity descended on her, half of which were cancelled out by the inertial dampener and flight suit.

Her targeting reticule on the center of her HUD lined up with the leading Imperial fighter.

Without a second thought she squeezed the trigger just as a trio of twin bright green blasts of energy fired from the central "ball" of the alien craft.

The Longsword dully vibrated as the twin 50mm Helilical railgun cannons spat a burst of nearly three dozen hypervelocity magnetically accelerated slugs at the enemy fighter.

It all happed nearly in a second as the slugs and burst of energy weapons fire crisscrossed the miles of separation.

Two of the blasts missed by yards, piercing the darkness of space as the third stuck the dead center of the Longsword's Plasma barrier that flashed red as it discharged.

The barrier collapsed causing temperature spikes on the leading edge of her Interceptor as Fey's mind noted that it had gotten slightly hotter in the cockpit, but the blast's effects were still thankfully absorbed or deflected back into space as Fey's heart caught in her throat.

The alien fighter wasn't so lucky.

The big slugs meant to destroy United Rebel Front fighters tore into the craft nearly without incident and shattered it, sheering it into two before exploding in a brief fireball.

"Fuck yeah!" her co-pilot screamed as she fired a quick burst from her maneuvering thrusters, using her "foreward" momentum to sidestep out of the line of fire and track her nose on the other fighters as her wingman also shredded an enemy fighter as the two remaining Fighters shot past the two Longswords as the Interceptor spun on its axis.

Re-engaging her port engine and punching the throttle to maximum she was crushed back into her seat with massive amounts of acceleration as she and her wingman gave chase.

In her radio chatter from the other pilots confirmed hits and three more enemy kills, but also a scream of defeat.

One unlucky Longsword was speared by four blasts of green energy from two Fighters and was cut in two before the main fusion reactor overloaded.

The tables were now relatively even, five Longswords against seven enemy fighters.

Fey's Longsword's massive acceleration, what made the Interceptor stand out cut into the distance of the two enemy fighters as they split up and went into two directions, one going "up" and the other going "down" as the UNSC interceptors split to pursue.

The enemy fighter performed a wild series of tight maneuvers in an attempt to throw off the Longsword, but despite its size being triple that of the alien craft easily, the human wedge shaped interceptor responded gracefully to her commands and reflexes thanks in no small part to a huge thrust ratio as she slid her targeting reticule right onto the central ball of the enemy fighter now a mere kilometer away.

She squeezed the trigger a second time as the forward leading edge of the "wings" on either side of the cockpit flashed with a burst of electrical fire while the craft vibrated a second time.

The burst of slugs this time struck the Imperial craft dead center, punching through the engine block and out of the other side and the cockpit, shredding it as the H shaped craft exploded violently into spinning debris and dissipating gases.

"That's a kill!"

Imperial Nebulon B Frigate Dark Watch****

"_He is on my six! Kryff these things are quickâ€¦ghaaâ€¦_" the voice of the _Dark Watch's_ last surviving Tie pilot cut off abruptly as it was blastedâ€¦shredded was the more appropriate term as large electromagnetically accelerated slugs from the UNSC's questionably large but now unquestionably deadly starfighters.

"How the hell did six fighters blow through twenty four TIEs with only one loss?! Look at them they are nearly the size of a small freighter!" Renad roared as his bridge crew scrambled about trying to do their tasks.

"Sir they must have some really powerful engines and thrust ratios to pull off being that fast and that large. They are also armed to the teeth and more maneuverable thanâ€¦."

Renad looked at his XO with a very brief look of rage before his more logical part of his brain kicked in and calmed down.

"What the hell were our pilots doing?" he said aloud as he looked at the viewer and sensors.

The dark angular wedges that were the UNSC "Fighters" had split into two pairs and were now a closing fast to the port side of the Frigate, two of the fighters going "up" and three going "down" and were moving quickly into weapons range as every second passed, looking to attack from both angles simultaneously.

"Arm our weapons. Get ready to blow them away and where is that enemy ship?" He ordered as the sensor officer replied nearly the instant he finished speaking.

"Sir I have them. They are 50,000 kilometers away and running. They are trying to move into a low orbit above the planet's primary satellite. However we are closing the distance and they will be in effective weapons range momentarily."

"Let's worry about these fighters firstâ€¦" He didn't get to finish before alarm warning went off.

"Enemy firing missiles!"

The five enemy fighters each launched a surprising six larger missiles as thirty missiles were suddenly screaming towards the Imperial warship launched from only 2,000 kilometers out, they would hit in seconds.

"Knock those things down!" Renad roared.

The firgate's vaunted armament of twelve Borstel RH8 Anti fighter Laser cannons sprung to life as dozens of deadly accurate pulses of emerald green energy and light cleaved into the darkness of space to swat the missiles down.

Three, four, six and then twelve of the missiles were reduced to nothing more than free floating atoms.

It still wasn't enough as the balance of the missiles impacted the shields of the ship.

The ship shook and groaned as a blinding white light enveloped the viewport of the bridge as Renad and the bridge crew were thrown to the deck.

"Nuclear weapons impact! Nuclear detonation against the shields! Shields down to 30 percent! Estimated firepower of enemy warheads in the thirty to thirty five megaton range!" his senior officer called out from a station near the fore of the bridge.

The Dark Watch was thrown some two kilometers and growing off of its previous course as the helmsman corrected its course.

"Knock them out of the sky!"

Knife Eight

"Its still there! Repeat target is still active!" Fey and her copilot shouted in alarm as her wildly maneuvering interceptor closed the gap to dangerously close ranges!"

"_Confirmed, fire everything we have and our Mini MACs after our nukes hit. We detected a large energy discharge and a drop in thermal and electrical output along the edge of the ship. We think that those may be their shields being strained and losing effectiveness."_ Lt. Alexi ordered as Fey cursed and fired another rapid burn from her maneuvering thrusters to blast her Longsword onto a new course heading.

"I detected it too. Forwarding it to the Commonwealth. We may be able to crack their shieldâ€¦!" her copilot didn't get the chance to finish his sentence as a blindingly bright spear of green energy shot past her craft.

And struck her wingmate's Longsword which was not a mile behind her dead center.

The explosion was instantaneous as the Longsword was simply vaporized as the craft promptly disappeared from her screens.

"Fuck me!" she shouted as dozens of energy blasts tracked her and the other UNSC Interceptors as the pilot's quick reactions performed wild series of bone crushing maneuvers as the stars spun outside of her fighter.

"Fire at will!" Lt. Alexi ordered.

"Fuun you got the missiles! I've got the MAC!" she growled as on her HUD the targeting reticule of the Interceptor's big main gun sprung to life.

Green blasts of energy filled her vision as they passed not meters behind and above the Longsword hitting the space where the craft had just been, creating a strobbing effect in the cockpit.

The enemy warship was now a speck in her vision that was growing frightfully larger by the second as she tried to do the task of aiming the gun and not being turned into a cloud of molten shrapnel.

"Missiles away! Winchester on nukes!" her copilot behind her shouted needlessly as the Longsword's last two large Nuclear missiles shot away from the fighter.

Another Longsword passed not a mile in front of her, emptying its missiles as well.

It was still too slow in executing its next maneuver as a trio of beams found it, turning it into a flaming cloud of debris before her as its missiles joined the others.

"We are going to be cutting this close!" She screamed as two comet like slugs from the surviving Longsword's MAC's slammed into the shields just before the missiles impacted, setting the electrical energy blister aglow as the slugs harmlessly bounced off.

However the missiles struck the still shimmering shields and enveloped them in nuclear fire of shaped nuclear warheads, briefly blinding Fey as the viewscreens compensated a half a second too late.

Her fighter was still careening towards the fireballs that were dissipating as the enemy ship's form slowly began to reveal itself.

"You have got to be aâ€¦!" Fuun breathed as a series of electrical sparks discharged out into the vacuum.

To her amazement a florescent barrier collapsed with a spark all around the sides of the vessel hugging its form as the energy and thermal readings on her Co-pilot's console dropped.

They had cracked the shields.

But she or Fuun didn't have any time to shout in victory or even comment on it.

"Pull up now!" her copilot shouted as the bow of the Imperial vessel was _miles_ in front of her.

They had under two seconds to react.

Almost on instinct she pulled the trigger on her flight stick.

The Interceptor jolted violently as its mini MAC fired, the frame of the ships groaning as inertial dampeners kept it from flying apart and recoil mitigators kept the ship from flying apart as a 140 millimeter slug of tungsten shot forth like a comet.

And stuck the bow of the ship.

Right on target to the main bridge.

Of course Lt. Fey didn't know just how lucky a shot she had made as she yanked the stick up, throwing the Longsword back onto a new course and away from becoming an oversized hood ornament on the Imperial ship's stricken bow, missing a collision by scant meters.

"We have penetrated their shields! Repeat the enemy ships shields are down and we have holed in on its forward bow!"

**UNSC Commonwealth**

"_We cracked its shields! Repeat we cracked its shields! Hull breach on the forward bow from successful MAC strike on critical area!"_ the bridge speakers of the beleaguered UNSC Frigate bellowed as the crew for a second time in 24 hours celebrated.

Captain Wallace took one more glance at Dr. Halsey.

"Can your Spartans do this?"

The doctor turned to look at him as if he had just questioned something as outrageous as asking if she were present or not.

"Of course Captain. Now order them to move." She replied bluntly with a hint of veiled anger at his questioning of _her_ soldiers.

The Captain was clearly taken aback for several seconds as he stared at the civilian who dared question his command.

And then moved to the communications officer at his consol.

"Order to Blue Team. Op is a go. Repeat, Op is a go. Hostile boarding action affirmed."

5. Chapter 5

Just as a note, the voices for the Mjolnir Suit's voices is the voice from the Crysis suit.

And take a guess where the Typhoon weapon comes from

Here we go.

Reviews are appreciated...very appreciated.

**2037 Hours, November 7, 2525**

**Chi Ceti 4**

John piloted the Pelican through the exit burn of their orbital path, then sent the ship toward the last known position of the Imperial vessel. The frigate had moved a hundred thousand kilometers towards the target to cover their approach, although whether or not the ship would survive contact with a second Imperial warship was to question, and if it had to fire a MAC slug from its main gun his team's mission would become a moot point.

A mile ahead of the Pelican dropship the remnants of the _Commonwealth's_ Longsword squadron flew as escort, looking to buzz the enemy warship and suppress any weapons that could blast the slower moving Pelican out of the skies.

However the enemy vessel had gone largely silent, only coasting under its own momentum as if someone had cut power to the ship. John did know that the Longswords had managed to strike a critical hit on the forward bow once they managed to somehow crack its shields.

Could they have possibly taken out the ship's main bridge?

Kelly sat in the copilot's seat, running yet another diagnostic on her new suit of powered armor, her model slightly different and more form fitting than the others due to her slightly less bulky size.

In the aft compartment was the rest of Blue team, the other Spartans and technicians from the Damascus facility with a dozen spare MJOLNIR suits having taken a separate Pelican to the _Commonwealth_.

Dr. Halsey and Captain Wallace didn't want to loose all of the Spartans if this Op went FUBAR.

He examined the ship's short-range detection gear, then said, "Captain Wallace may be trying to use Chi Ceti's magnetic field to deflect the Imperial's plasma weapons." He noted as the UNSC Frigate had taken up a position in a surprisingly low orbit relative to the enemy vessel that was still hurtling towards the planet.

"Imperial ship to port," she said, "three million kilometers and closing on the_ Commonwealth_."

John bumped up the magnification onscreen and spotted the ship. The forward bow of the alien vessel's hull was had a clear gash that was still losing debris from the impact of the Longsword's mini MACs, but it still was moving at the flank speed of a UNSC Cruiser even without a helm.

On the holo-tank next to the flight controls the holographic face of Dr. Halsey appeared with the bridge of the _Commonwealth_ in the background.

"Remember Spartans, the suit can recycle air for up to ninety minutes. It's shielded against radiation and EMP as well. It should be plenty for what you need. Good luck."

"Yes ma'am. We are on final approach, 117 out." He replied as he cut the link.

He then spoke to Sam over his COM link. "What kind of firepower are we carrying?"

"Wait one, sir," Sam replied. His voice returned a moment later. "We have a single a B-88 Infantry Level Small Diameter Nuclear Fission Bomb sir. If you are wanting me to be the volunteer to carry it..."

John chuckled, "I can carry it just fine, besides it might as well weigh nothing in these suits."

"Alright sir," Sam replied at once.

Kelly turned to John as she loaded a battery magazine to her BR-55 Gauss Rifle, "So I see we plan on inviting these aliens to a thermo nuclear party?"

John nodded, "Yes but only if we have to. I am more interested in capturing the ship, but the current course of that warship if it is indeed now flying ballistic will impact Chi Ceti, effectively rendering it uninhabitable, so we may have to nuke it anyway."

"Shall I ready my suit's thruster back then?" Kelly asked as she slapped the Gauss Rifle onto her back magnetic plate.

"Yes. Prepare for EVA."

Kelly nodded, "If we miss by a degree we go wide by kilometers..."

"So lets not miss." John replied with a slight grin.

Kelly and the other Spartans on the COM link chuckled.

"They may still have their reflective shields up." Sam spoke up on the COM, the Spartan floating alongside of the Pelican as the Supersoldier pulled several missiles out of their respective pods.

"True," John replied. "But the ship is damaged. They may have had to lower or reduce shielding in order to conserve power..."and if we have to, we can use one of our own warheads to punch a small hole in the barrier." He paused, then added, "There's also a large hole in their hull. Their shield may not cover that space entirely."

"Also..." he said as he thought aloud as he punched in the link to the Longswords.

"Knife squadron this is Blue Team. We are requesting that you break off. We are going to spacejump out of the Pelican and use it as a diversion. Hopefully the Imperials will shoot it down. But if you guys attack they may change course and raise their defensive shields."

A second went by before the commander of the lead Interceptor replied.

"_Are you sure? That is quite a gamble. If their point defenses or sensors are still up or any good they may detect each of you

individually and knock you out of the sky."_

"Affirmative, but this probably is the best way. You can stay back and pepper them with your MAC's if necessary, but we are going to aim dead on and into that nice little hole you guys kindly made for us."

There was a chuckle on the other end.

"Okay mister NAVSPEC WAR or whatever special division Marines you are. You can space jump and have some taxpayer money turn into scrap, but that might be the way to go. We will be there if you need us. Good hunting." The flight lead replied as the larger and angular interceptor wagged its wings before dramatically reversing thrust and shooting away in formation.

John nodded as he set the final course into the dropship's flight computer before climbing into the aft compartment.

His team of Spartans stood at attention, their new Power Armor almost shining brand new but loaded with enough weapons to take on a small army. He felt a rush of pride; they were ready to follow him as he leaped literally into the jaws of death.

"I've got the explosives Sam said. It was hard to mistake Sam even with his reflective blast shield covering his face. He was the largest Spartan— even more imposing encased in the armor, which was slightly modified and had several more smaller sections of green armor plating.

"Everyone's got one." Sam continued as he handed John an oversized block of C-12. "Timers and detonators are already rigged. So if you or any of us need to blow a hole into their ship or a bulkhead we can. Stuck on a patch of adhesive polymer; they'll cling to your suit."

"Spartans," John said, "check your suit's packs and make ready to go EVA. Suit's status?"

"All green sir!" the Spartan's answered in unison.

He nodded, grabbing a weapon from the cache of weapons that they brought with them.

He favored the MA6B Assault rifle long favored by the Marines and tried and true in vacuum thanks to its Elector-Thermal Acceleration firing system. He opened the back of the butt of the rifle as the back slid open to reveal the three barreled receiver as he slipped a tri-ammo strip into the triangular arranged barrel chambers. He snapped the receiver butt shut with a satisfying click as the ammo counter built into the barrel shroud read that all 60 armor piercing, stacked, tungsten wrapped 8mm rounds were ready to be shot out of the weapons three barrels at 1900 meters a second thanks to a jet of gas and plasma via an electrically ignited propellant producing a high intensity electro-chemical reaction.

He noted how small the medium sized weapon felt in his super human hands as he opened the MA6's under barrel airburst grenade launcher and inserted a 30mm programmable airburst grenade.

"Mission is a go."

He moved aft to the Pelican's rear main hatch and ramp.

"Imperial ship approaching," Kelly called out. "I'm pumping atmosphere to avoid explosive decompression when I drop the back hatch."

"We'll only get one shot at this," John said to the other Spartans. "Plot an intercept trajectory and fire your thrusters at max burn. If the target changes course, you'll have to make a best guess correction on the fly. If you make it, we'll regroup outside the hole in their hull. If you miss—we'll pick you up after we're done."

He hesitated, then added, "And if we don't succeed, then power down your systems and wait for UNSC reinforcements to retrieve you. Live to fight another day. Don't waste your lives."

There was a moment of silence.

"If anyone has a better plan, speak up now."

Sam patted John on the back. "This is a great plan. It'll be easier than Chief Mendez's playground. A bunch of little kids could pull it off."

Linda, who was for once not using her favored Sniper rifle as it would be useless in the confines of a ship, looked up at John as she sat cleaning her MA6.

She nodded.

"It will work."

"Sure," John said, remembering back to that hated obstacle training course that had kicked all of the Spartan's collective asses for months until they learned to work as a team. "Everyone ready?"

"Sir," they said. "We're ready, sir!"

John flipped the safety off and then punched in the code to open the Pelican's tail. The mechanism opened soundlessly in the vacuum. Outside was infinite blackness.

He had a feeling of falling through space—but the vertigo quickly passed.

He positioned himself on the edge of the ramp, both hands gripping a safety handle overhead.

The Imperial ship was a tiny dot in the center of his helmet's view screen. He plotted a course with his neural uplink, which drew out a holographic trajectory line for him to follow on his HUD as he activated his thrusters with a simple thought.

"_Thrusters._"

It was then that the dumb AI that was built into the suit of armor finally came to life with a monotone voice.

"_Thrusters activated, course locked in. Maximum burn."_

The two recessed boosters popped out of the back of the powered assault armor and activated, flinging him onto his approach vector on a maximum burn as acceleration slammed him. He knew the rest of Blue Team would launch right after him, but he couldn't turn to see them.

It occurred to him then that the Imperial ship might identify the Spartans as incoming missilesâ€”but judging from the Longsword's successful attack their point defense lasers were not as accurate as UNSC anti missile Pulse lasers or Helix Guns.

Or so he could hope.

John clicked on the COM channel as he contacted the _Commonwealth_. "Doctor, we could use a few decoys if Captain Wallace can spare them."

"Understood, "she said.

After about a minute of flight the Imperial vessel grew rapidly in his display, its course unchanged as it charged ahead. Traveling at few million kilometers an hour, even a minor course correction meant that he could miss by tens of thousands of kilometers. John carefully corrected his vector.

The pulse laser on the side of the Imperial ship glowed, built up energy, until they were dazzling neon blue, then dischargedâ€”but not at him.

On his radar the Pelican dropship, flying a lazy straight line some 10,000 kilometers to port, suddenly disappeared as the sacrificial drop ship was cored and exploded. John switched his suit's camera's to show a split visual of his rear, just in time to see explosions in his peripheral vision.

The _Commonwealth_ had fired a small salvo of her Archer missiles, targeted at the general area of the ship but destined not to hit, providing cover fire as the automated point defenses of the Imperial warship never the less reacted.

Around him in the dark were puffballs of red-orange detonationsâ€”utterly silent.

John's velocity now almost matched that of the ship. He eased toward the hullâ€”twenty meters, ten, five . . . and then the Imperial ship started to pull away from him.

It was traveling too fast. He tapped his attitude thrusters and pointed himself perpendicular to the hull.

The Imperial hull accelerated under him . . . but he was dropping closer.

He stretched out his arms. The hull raced past his fingertips a meter away. John's fingers brushed against the hull.

Their shields were still down. He glanced to either side. The huge

hole in their hull was nowhere in sight as the ship began to pull away from him.

No.

He refused to accept that he had made it this far, only to fail now.

A pulse laser flashed a hundred meters away; his faceplate barely polarized in time. The flash nearly blinded him.

With one last burn from his thrusters he flipped over as he closed the distance, and magnetized his boots as he "landed" on the Imperial ship with a thud, his suit and enhanced legs absorbing the impact.

He was now standing on the surface of the enemy vessel. The hull plates were smooth and angular, not unlike UNSC battleplating, with the difference between being subtle.

He had made it.

John slowly walked along the hull towards the hole where the Longsword's MACs had punched in the ship making his way to the bow.

When he made it to the hull breach, some five minutes later, the rest of Blue team were all assembled, Kelly, Linda and Sam, all waiting for him.

"What took you so long?" Sam's voice crackled over the COM channel. The other Spartan lifted her helmet's reflective blast shield.

"I think we're good to go," Kelly said. "I'm not getting any other responses over the COM channels." That meant either the Imperial ship was shielding their transmissions . . . or there were no left to communicate with. John pushed that last thought aside.

The hole was ten meters across. Jagged metal teeth pointed inward. John looked over the edge and saw that the mini MAC round had indeed passed all the way through. He saw two clearly exposed decks, severed conduits, and sheared metal beams.

If this was the bridge of the vessel it was indeed simply gone.

The Longsword pilot that pulled that off was either extremely skilled or lucky.

They climbed down through the debris, past broken consoles and warped metal, before making their way to an intact bulkhead John faced a sealed set of sliding pressure doors.

He and Sam grabbed either side and pulled, strained, and then the mechanism gave and the doors released. Luckily there was no explosive decompression of atmosphere racing out, as he and the Spartans braced themselves for an oncoming gale that didn't manifest. They had gotten lucky and had found a double set of pressure doors with just enough room for them to all fit in as Sam and John forced shut the first set of doors which thankfully snapped shut with a clasp, hopefully creating a seal against the vacuum.

Kelly looked at the door and the opening mechanism, a set of controls with unfamiliar markings on them.

"We may have to blast it open." Kelly replied as John looked at the small set of controls.

The marking were indeed unusual and unlegible to him even as his suit's computer and AI's translation system tried to decipher the meanings.

"_Language read error. Syntax and Grammer unknown_."

"Well I guess we could always blow it open." Linda remarked as John ran his armored hand over the controls.

One of the buttons on the top of the pad had flashed green when he and Sam had secured the blast door.

That had to meanâ€|

He pressed the button.

And the doors slid open as a breeze of atmosphere filled the bulkhead as the interior of the ship revealed itself to the Spartans.

All of whom snapped their weapons to the ready waiting for anything as they looked into the dark grey corridors as red running lights flashed the length of them.

"Wellâ€|." John spoke as his suit ran a diagnostic on the atmosphere.

"That was easy."

There was a last hiss of atmosphere with a dark hallway beyond. They entered in formationâ€|covering each other's blind spots.

**Imperial Nebulon B Frigate Dark Watch**

Commander Renad awoke with a start as he shot out of the medical bay's surgical beds.

The last thing he remembered was running out of the bridge towards engineering to deal with the overload to the shield arrays dealt from those UNSC fighter's multiple nuclear weapon strikes before a terrible crash and a sudden crack and thrown him against the nearest bulkhead knocking him out cold.

"What the Kryf happened!?" he nearly yelled as the medical droids hovered towards him and the lone doctor that the ship carried, an older man whom had certainly seen service in the Clone Wars and was serving out the remainder of his career in what would have been a simple assignment turned to him as he operated on one of the many wounded soldiers that now littered the Med Bay.

"Those UNSC fighters got a direct hit on the bridge sir. Its gone with all of the officers." The man replied as he threw Renad a data pad as he caught it with his left hand as he ignored the pounding

headache.

The situation was more than dire.

He was the last officer left, and that was only by sheer dumb luck. The "primitives" had taken out not only the bridge, but the kinetic energy weapon which tore through the bridge had also cut all controls to the helm and weapons with the point defenses reverting to dumb automatic tracking mode.

But the worst part was that the ship had already been on a course which would intercept with the planet, which was now growing ever larger on the external cameras.

"We only have about an hour at best before we hit that planet, we have got to get off of this ship and send a message back to the Grand Admiral." He replied as he got up, grabbing a blaster from the surgery table and holstering it.

"We have to get these people out of here then. Luckily the Storm Trooper contingent is intact and most of the remaining crew is alive, so we can move these people to the life pods."

The com link on the Commander's hip chirped to life as he grabbed it.

It was the ship's automated subsystems.

"Pressure reduction on forward deck A-3. Blast doors opened. Four unknown contacts entering deck."

Renad's eyes grew wide with realization.

"Sound the intruder alert!"

Hostile Imperial Vessel****

As John took point and rounded the second corner of the corridor his suit's sensors finally finished sampling the atmosphere of the interior of the vessel.

"_Atmospheric compositionâ€|scanningâ€|.scanningâ€|.detecting atmospheric composition of 78.09% nitrogen, 20.95% oxygen, 0.93% argon, 0.039% carbon dioxide. Breathable standard Earth atmosphere. No contagions detected."_

John looked at the others, "Recycle your air and add it to your supply in case we need it. These aliens may not be too different than we are if they breath our atmosphere. Likely humanoid."

The others nodded.

The UNSC and humanity had long ago ran into extra-terrestrial life, but none of them had been anything more than animals or fauna native to colonized worlds. He could only imagine how their first sight of a sentient non-human race would look like.

If only first contact didn't involve the glassing of a world.

Affirmative lights flashed on his HUD as the rest of the Team opened up their respirators and began exchanging their stale recycled air for the fresh clean air of the enemy vessel.

John rounded the corner, his MA6 at the ready and his targeting reticule searching for targets, his suit's radar and motion tracker finding no threats as the suit's status systems were all green, reminding John that his suit's recessed launcher had two M-2MM Arrow 33mm Micro RPGs that were ready to be launched with a simple thought as he ran a quick check on them.

"We need to get as close to the center of this ship's mass so this 10 kiloton nuke can effectively destroy this thing, my sonar is showing that we need to go up two decks and about 50 meters forward.

It was then that the unfamiliar sound of an alarm began wailing throughout the ship.

John's heart froze for a second.

"They know we are here. All Spartans form up and prepare for hostiles, we still need to move. Double Time!" he shouted into the coms as the Spartans moved down the corridors and through eerily empty service rooms.

"I've got contact! Five contacts on my motion trackers, waitâ€¦|.correction ten enemy contacts! Five coming from down the corridors, they are trying to box us in." Linda warned calmly as John took stock of their situation.

They had one option.

"Get ready Spartans! We need to fight through them or we will be surrounded. Get into cover! Plasma Barriers up!"

John's Plasma Barrier emitter on his left forearm sprang to life in under a second as the emitter synched up with the suit's threat tracker, ready to activate into a protective wall to cover his front if he kept his firing position or to act as an energy riot shield if he held his arm the correct way should the complex sensor detect an incoming projectile or the temperature or energy release of an incoming energy weapon.

He didn't have to wait long as he and the other Spartans just managed to find any tiny bit of cover they could as he took cover around the corner of the corridor.

Down the corridor some 30 meters distant five and then ten of the Imperial soldiers spun around from behind the corners with unfamiliar weapons sweeping for targets.

They were not what he was expecting.

They were almost human like with two arms and two legs and with almost the exact outright human physiology. However they were covered from head to toe in white washed armor of unfamiliar composition with a helmet that had two eye pieces instead of a full visor and an almost frowning respirator like "face".

Their weapons seemed to be a medium sized carbine like weapon that

had an identifiable barrel but with a strangely large muzzle bore that was certainly larger than whatever ammunition that it could have fired from the small magazine on the side of the weapon.

The enemy soldiers advanced in a recognizable formation much like one used by the Marines, Colonial Guard or a Police force and covering each other as they advanced.

"Weapons hot in threeâ€|"

John counted down as he did one last check on his suit's weapons.

"Two."

"One."

"Open fire."

As the words left his mouth he and the others spun out of their cover in a blur of superhuman speed and in a flash had raised their weapons with such speed that the Imperial soldiers, whom were expecting to find them, were still caught unawares as they seemed to bring their own weapons to bare in slow motion.

John had already sighted on the first enemy as adrenaline pumped through him and pulled the trigger, having set his MA6 to three round burst mode.

His weapon barked as a single hypersonic 8mm tungsten projectiles were accelerated out of each of the weapon's three barrels by an electro thermal chemical reaction and a jet of gases and plasma.

The rounds impacted the target dead center on its chestâ€|.and punched right through, splaying the being open as â€|._crimson bloodâ€|._sprayed the white trooper behind it.

John shifted targets in a flash and put another three rounds through the armored head of another as four more bodies hit the deck , victims of the Spartan's fire.

Return fire from the aliens finally flew past them, bright crimson bolts of energy not unlike the plasma weapons their ship's used.

One splashed against Sam's Plasma Barrier as the protective wall of energized gases and magnetic field flashed in a bright red discharge of electricity as the shot was absorbed and refracted, keeping Sam safe as the Spartan cut down the offending Imperial with a burst from his rifle.

The Imperials were simply halted and cut down by the Spartans whom stood their ground as Linda finished the last enemy soldier of with two quick shots through the chest of the last Imperial with her BR-55 Gauss Rifle as the enemy soldier fell to the deck dead.

"Clear." Sam chimed as John nodded, searching for more contacts on his sensors.

"Those weapons pack a punch, that hit dropped my barrier by over a quarter." Sam noted

"Alright everyone lets grab one of those weapons and any tech we can bring back to Halsey." He pointed to Kelly.

"See if you can pull the helmet off of one of these Imperials and see what our enemy looks like."

"Yes sir." Kelly replied as she knelt over the fallen Imperial whom was the victim of a trio of armor piercing rounds coring through its chest as human like blood pooled around it.

For several seconds Kelly fumbled with the white helmet before finally finding a release button.

"Got it." She chimed as the helmet slid off.

"What in the hell?" Sam asked aloud over the com as John simply stood, his suit recording everything he was seeing.

It was a human.

A man in his late twenties perhaps with short black hair and a tanned appearance with a strong jaw that was still slack with the last expression or surprise and pain before his life was cut short.

John had killed before several times and had taken the lives of dozens of Insurrectionalists and Rebels, but still part of his mind had to shake off seeing the face of a human enemy before his hardened military drilled mind steeled itself.

"How the hell is this possible? They cant be URF or Innies. What the hell does this mean?" Kelly asked as John merely nodded.

"We have a mission to complete. Stack up."

**Dark Watch**

"The enemy soldiers are heavily armed and armored in assault power armor suits. Fireteams Bravo and Charlie are down." The Stormtrooper sergeant on the other end replied as Renad and a squad of Stormtroopers ran towards the engineering section.

"They are heading to engineering! They are going to try and either space us or detonate a bomb inside this ship. Set up E-Webs at key points to keep these bastards out!"

**Hostile Imperial Vessel**

The heavy energy weapon hammered the wall John was crouched behind as two more huge crimson bolts tore into the cover, turning it into molten slag as Sam dodged another bolt with superhuman speed and a blur of green as he got to cover.

"They are setting up heavy weapons sir. My scanners show that this corridor splits into four separate avenues of approach all leading to what must be a large chamber, likely their engineering section which would account for the temperature and energy readings." Kelly replied as yet more burst of energy cut through the space between the Spartan's cover.

John nodded, "Split up, each person gets their own hallway to clear, use your Smart Grenade, Micro RPG's and airburst grenade launchers, and be sure to have them all set to fill in the correct amount of space so they don't expose use to vacuum and rupture the hull."

"Yes sir."

The Spartans all separated, each of them moving to their own access corridor around the cramped corridors and bulkheads.

"We are all set sir."

John took in a deep breath.

"Take them."

As he spoke those words a symphony of violence echoed through the ship as four Spartan II class Commandos all charged their Imperial adversaries.

John spun around the corner with his rifle at the ready, running towards the Imperial's in cover behind a barricade and their heavy weapon as the mounted gun charged and fired.

John felt a surge of adrenaline as blood pumped through his veins and time seemed to slow.

The crimson bolt of energy seemed to slow down as John for yet another time experienced Spartan Time. John simply slid under the bolt as it sailed over his head, passing through the space where he had just occupied harmlessly.

Already moving at full tilt John rolled and activated his built in launcher as he side stepped two more bolts from accompanying Imperial troopers and another blast from the heavy energy weapon.

The target had already been acquired through his neural uplink as the red outline of the enemy soldier manning the weapon now only 20 meters away flashed.

Fire.

The slight bulge on his left shoulder opened for a split second as one of the two 35mm anti-personnel and light armor RPGs shot away from his armor alone a small plume of fire.

The enemy soldiers didn't even have time to react as the tiny missile slammed into the unfortunate Imperial, gouging itself into the white armor before detonating.

The walls were painted a dark crimson in blood and entrails as John shot through the smoke and sailed over the barricade, his weapon searching for targets.

One of the Imperials was still active, dazed on the ground as John landed with a thud.

Before the enemy soldier ever got the chance to get up John simply delivered a swift kick to the chest, deforming the strange and apparently weak armor in and throwing the Imperial into the bulkhead

with such force that the _"human"_ inside died instantly.

He scanned his surroundings, he was all clear.

He could hear other sounds of muffled gunfire and energy weapons as the other Spartans assaulted their targets, including the dull whump of an airburst grenade.

All of Blue Team's status lights read green.

In front of John was a sealed bulkhead that the enemy had been guarding, and according to his sensors the objective was in there, meaning he could place the B-88 nuke here and have it vaporize most of the ship's mass.

He stepped forward with his rifle ready.

Before he reached it his motion tracker picked up movement on the other side as three red dots appeared on his HUD.

He gripped his rifle as he took one last step to the door, which slid opened.

Revealing far more than simply three contacts. It was a engineering section of sorts with an unfamiliar drive core dominating the far section with conduits and exhaust ports and pipes running all across the room, which also had three levels that had two walkways and a platform.

And it was full of White clad Imperials and several plain clothed Humans dressed in a dark grey uniform with a simple cap and unknown rank insignias on their chests.

And they were all ready for him.

"Oh shit." John said aloud as the Spartan and the Imperials looked at each other for a full two seconds before all hell broke loose.

Then one of the officers pointed towards him drawing a stubby looking pistol.

"Blast him!"

They speak English?! " John numbly thought as the enemy soldiers all spun to bring their weapons to bare as adrenaline pumped through his already enhanced senses, his threat tracker outlining dozens of contacts.

Warning. Danger.

John sprang into action as he brought up his MA6D in a blur and let loose on a pair of armored Imperials who were closest to the door he exited.

The rifle roared as the three barrels spat out 8mm tungsten at hypersonic speeds.

The enemy troopers had yet to raise their weapons before the he first three rounds hit the first trooper, one round flattening against the armor and deforming it inwards at an alarming angle as the other two

shots simply punched through, splaying the man inside as John swept the weapon's targeting reticule onto the next enemy soldier, putting a quick burst into its skull and through it.

In under two seconds John had turned the first two Imperials into bloody heaps as the others finally reacted.

John turned and began to strafe his enemies, keeping his back parallel to the wall as the first bolts of plasma and energy blasts sailed after him, going wide as the Spartan moved much faster than a normal person and tearing into the wall behind him and turning it into ozone as the Spartan fired on a cluster Unarmored Imperials, likely simple crew, whom were blazing away at him with poorly aimed shots and were packed close together behind a supply crate.

Another long roar of his assault rifle later and the group was torn to shreds, blood painted the wall and ground behind them as his suit gave a shrill warning.

Danger

John rolled into a spot of cover as twin bolts of blood red energy impacted his plasma barrier, the threat tracker identifying the threat and bringing up the barrier to cover his back, dropping them by thirty percent .

John spun out of his exposed cover as another trio of bolts tore into his last position a split second later, just in time to see two more armored foes nearly flanking him as a bolt of energy got lucky and struck his armored chest plate, hitting him like a punch as his armor reacted, the inner layer of nano tubes and liquid metal hardening and turning into a layer as tough as crystal as the thick composite battle plate of advance titanium materials took the beating, glowing hot for a split second as the force of the impact was absorbed and refracted, his outer combat shell holding strong as a temperature warning gave out and spiked up.

"_Armor integrity at 84 percent on chest plate_"

John dodged the second bolt in a blur of super human speed as he side stepped the bolt and retrained his weapon on to the critical threats.

With no time to reload or switch weapons the Spartan simply activated the under slung 35 mm Grenade launcher on his MA6 as the Smart munition's airburst detonation system computed the necessary range and yield to detonate.

He launched the grenade with a dull thunk, the airburst grenade detonating and consuming the troopers in fire and shrapnel.

John reloaded in a flash as the Imperials recovered, forcing him back down into cover as energy weapon fire burned the air above him, one striking his reconstituted forward Plasma barrier.

He needed to move before he was encircled.

Seeing another barricade to use as cover that was closer to the enemy John rolled out of cover and charged at a group Imperials that were in his way, hip firing his rifle and sidestepping a trio of shots in

a superhuman blur of speed, tearing them apart as he slid into a firing position as bolts of plasma flew around him or impacted his plasma barrier, dropping it nearly to half power.

Popping back out of cover he sighted in two armored Imperial troopers on the catwalk above, not taking any more than two seconds to tear them apart with burps from his MA6 as 8mm tungsten tore through their bodies.

Still he was being surrounded, and he needed to provide a diversion as his motion tracker highlighted targets above trying to flank him.

Not wasting anytime John took a Frag grenade and tossed it behind him and over his barricade.

Two seconds later the dull boom and screams filled the air as John once again popped out of cover and dispatch two more Imperial crew as his weapon counter clicked empty again.

He rolled into cover, avoiding another hail of energy bolts as five enemy troopers began to encircle him.

John cursed as he had no time to reload his rifle, instead pulling out his secondary weapon that he had attached to his magnetic strip on his lower back.

It was probably nothing short of the most devastatingly effective CQC weapon available, the SPW-10 , better known as the Typhoon. It worked similarly to the MA6 with its munitions stacked, however it sacrificed the accuracy, penetration and brutal stopping power of the larger electrothermal accelerated round for a smaller round with an incredible rate of fire. It featured 10 Separate Barrels, each holding 72, 4mm Caseless rounds for a total of a whopping 720 rounds, which it could fire off at an astounding 500 rounds per _second_.

Although not the most effective weapon for anything further away than 50 yards or any heavily armored enemy, it would be more than enough to clear out a wave of enemies in seconds.

He spun out of cover, weapon at the ready as another energy bolt impacted his forward plasma barrier, his HUD tagging the enemies, but it wasn't necessary.

He held down the firing stud.

A strange power tool like sound tore through the wine of energy weapons as John swept his targeting reticule over the Imperials.

Their bodies withered like rag dolls as dozens of slugs tore into them, pummeling through the armor and turning the person inside into entrails.

It was over in under two seconds.

The Imperials were simply turned into torn bodies of flesh, equipment and bone as the few remaining Imperials on the catwalks were momentarily stunned.

Five shots cracked through the silence as his team poured in, cutting the remaining Imperials apart with fire from Linda's Gauss Battle Rifle, 5mm magnetically accelerated slugs tearing through the enemy soldiers at 2200 meters a second.

"Clear!" Sam shouted as the Spartans formed up on him, John noticing a burn mark on Sam's shoulder armor.

"It's all good, they put up stiffer resistance for us. But it looks like you sure had fun." Sam replied as he survived the carnage John had created.

"I nearly stumbled into a trap honestly, I got lucky." He replied as he gathered his MA6 and placed the Typhoon back on its magnetic strip.

"Kelly, let's activate that nuke and get the hell out of here, this ship is about to impact the planet."

Kelly nodded as she pulled out the B-88 infantry nuke.

"At this location the bomb should vaporize a majority of the enemy ship and knock the rest of it sufficiently off course away from the planet. Setting timer to three minutes."

"Affirmative. Spartans, let's get off of this ship. Secure any items you found. I know Halsey would like us to gather more but we don't have the time. Let's RTB."

**Engineering**

**Dark Watch**

Renad gasped for air as he pulled himself along the deck, the enemy soldier's projectile weapon having hit his left arm above the elbow, taking it completely off as blood pooled around him.

He had fastened a simple tourniquet to try and stop the bleeding, but the firefight had continued around him as he had instantly passed out from the pain.

He had barely managed to get a shot off at the enemy soldier that had stormed the engineering, killing his troopers and crew with little pause.

One enemy soldier did this.

It was nearly 8 feet tall and had been covered from head to toe in a rather impressive looking and heavily armored green power armored battle suit, that could clearly take hits from Blasters much like the rare material pink and most troubling was equipped with a semi directed energy shield.

But what he still was having trouble grasping as he struggled to stay conscious, was how the enemy "was it a droid or a human" moved. He hadn't seen any being move that fast sense the Jedi.

It had dodged and sidestepped blast after blast of blaster fire in a green blur, killing well trained and experienced storm troopers with

little effort.

"What the kryff were you?!" he asked aloud as he finally gave up and rolled onto his back, wincing in pain.

It was then that he noticed a small device the size of a small power cell, unfamiliar looking and clearly not belonging to the rest of the equipment in the engineering compartment.

Then it made a small chiming sound.

And the world turned white.

As the remains of the Imperial Nebulon B frigate that were not consumed by the nuclear fire tumbled onto a new direction, skimming over the atmosphere of Chi Ceti 4, the Spartans of Blue team flew through space with their thrusters engaged, looking to rendezvous with the looming form of the UNSC Commonwealth, their first mission with their MJOLNIR armor successful, and all of them alive.

It would only be the start of a much larger war to come.

****UP NEXTâ€|****

****The Battle of Harvest, UNSC Fleet vs. the Imperial Fleet.****

****Admiral Thrawn vs. Admiral Preston Cole.****

6. Chapter 6 Part One

The Second Battle of Harvest, Part One****

_November 10**__**th**__**, 2525**_**

Epsilon Indi Star System****

1 Standard AU from Harvest orbit.****

UNSC Everest****

In the blackness of space fifty seven ruptures in realspace opened up. A swirling mass of light and exotic radiation pooled into what appeared to be holes in the fabric of space. And out of them came steaming the fifty seven UNSC warships of Battle Group X-Ray.

"Status report." Admiral Cole ordered as he walked towards the fore of the bridge, huge holographic screens giving out status updates throughout the confines of his flagship as the crew went about in a flurry of well trained duties and actions, creating a hive of activity.

"All ships reporting green sir. No damage to report." His senior XO, Chang Wein reported as the middle aged woman came to his side. They had served together on board one of the first Halcyon Class Cruisers during the waning days of the Rebellion War during combat in orbit of the URF allied inner colony world of Ashkelon where he had earning his stars, and even briefly before that on an ancient Corvette.

Keeping her hair in a short and smart pony tail she read over the status of the ship.

"Where are we in reference to Harvest?"

The holographic viewer closest to him immediately morphed into a nearly lifelike image of Harvest and its solar system. The holographic representation of his ships were highlighted in blue.

"Enemy ships coming up on sensors sir!" the ship's AI , Frost, notified.

"They have reinforced their position." Cole thought aloud.

"_That means they want to take this system."_ He thought to himself.

"How many ships?"

"I've got Thirty nine contacts sir!" the sensor officer replied as the holographic image morphed again to show the glaring red outlines of thirty nine unknown red contacts.

"All but one of them are holding position on the far side of Harvest's gravity well, with another single contact holding position in the Lagrangian point of Harvest's moon.

Cole nodded.

"Profiles?" he asked as the armored plating slid to cover the transparent steel windows at the fore of the Battlecruiser's bridge, a main viewscreen taking its place.

"Coming in now sir. Damn they are big."

"Show me."

The viewscreen morphed to show the Imperial vessels.

Nine of the vessels were of the same type as the original ship encountered, nearly the exact size of the Everest, itself a Valiant Class Battlecruiser, they were a dull grey wedge with a towering superstructure, six large turreted heavy weapons and dozens of other weapons ports. Twelve more of the contacts were of a similar design but smaller at just under a thousand meters in length, but were also heavily armed with a slightly different layout for its superstructure. Twelve more of the contacts were of a different design philosophy, lacking the wedge shape with a bulbous like clam shell bow and multiple blisters that held several larger weapons ports, being only slightly larger than a heavy destroyer. Three more of the contacts were much smaller, clearly escorts, were nearly as small as the older URF Corvettes. Another three were closer to the size of a light cruiser, this time also having the wedge shaped hull of the larger contacts, this time however holding position at the rear of the enemy formation, likely a carrier type vessel.

However the largest of the enemy vessels was separate from the others, this one being the contact that was in orbit of Harvest's moon.

It was monstrous, larger than any vessel ever before seen by anyone in the UNSC, and covered in nothing but weapons ports and armor, sharing the same wedge shape but with a recessed superstructure. The sensor readouts painted the thing at an astounding 4,800 meters.

"My God that thing is as large as any of our spacedocks or orbital works; Christ only Reach's or Earth's primary dockyards and the old O'Neil Cylinder Colonies are bigger." Wien commented.

Preston Cole looked on in silence, taking in everything about this enemy that he could. For him there were simply too many unknowns thus far, but he did know one thing, he was the underdog.

He would have to go back on his years of endless training and experience, yet there was one thing that dwelled in the back of his mind.

For all of his three decades of service in the UNSC, he had never fought as the underdog.

When fighting against the United Rebel Front and their fleets he knew he could always count on eventual reinforcements and on having more ships and personnel than the enemy, and for them to likely be more advanced or powerful. Now the roles were reversed, and this time the enemy was in possession of weaponry and technology ahead of his own.

He looked at the officers around him, although many of them were veterans from the Rebellion War, just as many were fresh out of officers school.

"_They believe in me."_

"_Godâ€"I can see it in their eyes. They believe that the Admiral Cole is leading them into victory. Maybe . . . but regardless, the truth of the matter is I will also be leading them straight into hell."_

He pushed those thoughts aside as his mind began a series of calculations and scenarios.

Cole turned to the tactical screens, the blue highlighted forms of the ships in his command around his flagship with the _Everest_ in the center.

A translucent screen the size of a blackboard appeared before him projected from the nearest viewer as Cole, with deft motions, zoomed back and forth through the spatial planes of this star system.

"Order the Assault Ships to hold position at the edge of the star system and for the _Musashi_ to launch her Interceptors with her slipspace drive primed for an emergency jump."

He paused, looking at the ruined form of Harvest that was enlarged on the primary viewscreen, the fires on the surface still were raging as dust and smoke choked the atmosphere, only offering brief glimpses of the world now ruined by orbital bombardment.

"Order the Prowlers to go dark, I want one to shadow us, another to make a flyby of the planet and gain us much information about possible enemy ground positions as they can and if any of our people are still alive down there. If not our assault ships will sterilize the enemy positions from across the system. The third prowler is to try and place itself between us and that enemy fleet, with full authorization for Havoc Nuclear Mine usage. All ships are to enter combat formation Bravo - Theta. Weapons to maximum yeilds and Defensive Barriers up. I want a slingshot orbit around Harvest's moon, put it in between us and the main enemy fleet but designate five ships to break off to intercept that enemyâ€¦" Cole paused as he thought of a designation for the gigantic Imperial warship.

"Dreadnaught. Designate Tango Alpha Zero."

The ship's AI nodded.

"Increase battle group velocity to three quarters full, and transmit burn vectors to the fleet," Cole ordered, directed at yet another one of his adjutant officers.

"Aye sir. Slaving fleetwide AI's to your command."

Cole nodded as he turned to Wien, "I want our Charon spy drones up and running, and for the fleet to deploy their S.T.A.R.S micro satellites, have them disperse throughout the immediate gravity well and Harvest's orbit. We will need all the sensor and targeting data we can get."

"Aye sir. Launching drones and sats now."

"Also Have all Longswords ready to launch with the order. When they do I want them to hold position close to the fleet, no more than 200 miles out."

Cole nodded impassively as his orders were carried out and the ship rumbled beneath his feet as it accelerated.

The UNSC ships organized themselves in their formation, a three dimensional pyramid with the _Everest_ at the center, an even spacing of ten miles between each ship as the Frigates and Destroyers took up position around the larger Halcyon and Marathon Cruisers, which in turn encircled the lone Battlecruiser at the center of the formation. In the midst of the sea of stars fifty two comets seemed flare into existence in the darkness as the group of warships, all of them the most advanced and powerful weapons of war _Earth_ and her colonies had ever created accelerated toward the Imperial vessels parked in the gravitational well of Harvest.

Admiral Cole took one last look at the crew around him as they executed his orders flawlessly, and then another look at the enemy warships.

He could try to talk to these aliens, but they clearly were not in the talking mood, that much they had already proven, the ruined world of Harvest and the wreckage of its orbital works a testament to that.

The time to talk was long over, but any communication with the enemy

would reveal information about them, and still there was the dim hope, however unlikely, that this could all be resolved peacefully.

**Imperial II Class Star Destroyer **

**ISD Admonitor**

"Sir they are accelerating! Matching cruising speeds of an Imperial Class Star Destroyer. Fifty four contacts sir. Two of the larger ones are moving to the edge of the system and are accelerating while the other fifty two are assuming a pyramid type formation with moderate spacing in between each ship. Profiles coming in now sir." Voss Parik, his senior officer, called out from his position in one of the officer "pits" of consoles, standing behind the main sensor officer.

Thrawn nodded, taking note of his fleets position and formation.

He glared however at the lone icon on the main display that was Admiral Gail and his ship, the _Helmsman_.

It was defiantly standing its ground, turning towards the enemy fleet and not responding to his orders to form up at the center wedge of his main fleet.

Imbecile, that man.

Thrawn nodded, "Put it on the screen."

"Aye sir."

They looked similar to the three ships encountered by the _Fires of Mustafar_ days ago, but he could already tell that these were likely to be far more serious opponents.

Where as most non-Imperial ships in the galaxy were designed with usually some sense of art or stylistic choice, these were clearly meant for one thing, war. Even many of his own ships while optimized for battle still held notable features that were supposed to induce fear simply with its appearance.

No. These warships were meant to exude fear not from their appearance, but from their capabilities. Thrawns trained eyes picked out meticulously placed thruster ports, dozens of oversized torpedo tubes—there were a lot—layered point defenses, secondary batteries of what were likely those Mass Drivers previously encountered, but much larger.

They had few, if any viewports, and; most notable of all, had huge notable muzzles on their bows, some of them two while the flagship held three; for a spinally mounted weapon of some sort.

Thirty two of them were smaller Heavy cruiser sized contacts, that were further differentiated into two separate designs.

Likely sub classes

One was smaller and "appeared" less armored and more maneuverable, sporting a unique forked forward bow and what looked like small

hangars for strike craft flanking that on either side, but still was heavily armed. The same general type of ship which was leading the flotilla of ships which had attacked the Fires of Mustafar, possessing one large muzzle on the top "fork" of the hull and measuring in at 535 meters.

A multirole vessel, a heavy star frigate or destroyer.

The other was slightly larger at nearly 600 meters, and was covered in a noticeably larger amount of armor and lacked any visible hangars for strike craft or fighters. However instead this class opted for more weapons; it held at least a dozen obvious weapons and torpedo ports and had two of those muzzles lined up vertically. Instead of possessing the forked forward bow of the others it held a more angular appearance with larger engines and maneuvering thrusters.

Clearly a designated ship killer, likely a standard heavy destroyer or light dreadnaught type vessel, meant to hit hard and be maneuverable.

The larger ships, numbering some eighteen of them, were again separated into two different types of vessels, each one larger than an older Venator Class Star Destroyer.

Ten of them were larger than the other eight, and aside from aesthetic differences, they clearly carried more weapons, mounting several turrets on their port and starboard side and two large, twin barreled static guns which were likely larger versions of a Hypervelocity gun, on the dorsal flank and one on the ventral flank. Also apparent were twin muzzles on its bow, however this time their diameters were noticeably larger than those of the smaller ships, likely a much heavier class of spinal weapon system.

The other star-cruiser type vessels were slightly smaller and carried only one large spinal weapon and lacked the twin fixed heavier Hypervelocity guns, but still carried eight large weapon turrets and the dozens upon dozens of torpedo tubes.

The last notable warship, aside from what was clearly a carrier type vessel at the rear of their formation, was the size of an Imperial Star Destroyer and was an enlarged version of the more heavily armed star cruisers, mounting what appeared to be three spinal weapons and twice as many weapon turrets and torpedo tubes, clearly the flagship of the fleet with its placement at the center of the pyramid formation, encircled by protective ranks of the smaller ships and four of the larger star cruisers.

Thrawns lips finally erased their pencil thin line as he calmly began with his orders, having thought out multiple scenarios and maneuvers.

"Those ships are going to slingshot themselves around the moon and towards our formation." He spoke as the nearest holoprojector stenciled out the path the enemy fleet would likely follow.

"However as foolhardy as Admiral Gail is his ship's placement will prove useful. They will be forced to either send in their full fleet or break off a squadron to deal with the Helmsman. This will give us a view of their tactics and firepower before they hit the main

fleet."

The icons of his fleet appeared, blue triangle wedges of his Star Destroyers and blue squares of the lighter ships arranged in a triple wedge formation with ten ships in each wedge, the standard ten miles of separation between each warship.

"Orders for the fleet?" Parik asked as a Victory Cruiser slid into position above and in front of the Admonitor, protecting the flagship from direct fire.

"I want the fleet to remain here and to hold formation. Let them come to us and see what they do."

His senior officer looked at him for a second before nodding, he was used to Thrawn's tactics.

Many in the Imperial navy would have called them overly cautious, but for those whom had served under him they simply knew he was observing the enemy, waiting for the right moment to strike and pounce on them with devastating results.

"Sir the Helmsman is hailing, Admiral Gail is requestingâ€¦_informing_ us that he is moving to engage the enemy, and that.." the man paused, a slightly bemused look crossing his face before continuing as he listened to the headset.

"â€¦he is ordering one of our wings to accompany him to flank the enemy fleet from the moon and to slingshot into their approach at flank speed."

Thrawn merely looked at the viewscreen, turning to the man as he chuckled aloud.

Admiral Gail was certainly not quiet about his distaste of being secondary to Thrawn.

"Belay that order. Inform him that he is welcome to engage at his discretion."

The man nodded as Parik turned to him.

"Looking to dispose of a nuisance?"

Admiral Thrawn simply crossed his arms over his white uniform.

ISS Helmsman

A Praetor Class Star Battlecruiser was a sight that trillions in the galaxy would fear. Rebel Commanders had only made the mistake of directly engaging a Praetor II once, losing a MC-80 Mon Calamari Star Cruiser with heavy damage to a second along with the total loss of two Assault Destroyers with only moderate damage to the Imperial Battlecruiser.

Armed with 40 Heavy dual Turbo Laser Turrets, 20 Ion Cannons, 30 quad Turbo Lasers and another three dozen secondary Laser banks for point defense, and equipped with shields powerful enough to withstand low velocity collisions with medium sized asteroids and able to actually

reflect salvos of turbo laser fire, Admiral Mils Gail had every reason to be confident in his chances of success as five UNSC Warships broke off from Cole's main fleet to intercept the giant of an enemy ship.

Standing at the fore of the cavernous command center Mils Gail balled his fist in rage as his lieutenant read the response from the Grand Admiral, the portly pale middle aged man nearly throwing the nearest object he could find across the bridge.

"That Blue skinned red eyedâ€¦.gahh!" He nearly shouted as he stopped just short of yelling an overtly xenophobic term.

"Sir the enemy ships are breaking off and accelerating, five enemy ships, two star cruiser class vessels and three star frigate analogues. Sensors detect high X-Band sensors locking onto us. Range 80,000 kilometers and closing." Gail's XO calmly retorted as the tactical screens zoomed in on the enemy ships, readouts of energy readings and other data displayed on the screen as the other five dozen officers present went about their tasks at their consoles.

Gail snorted, " Shields to full. These primitives cant possibly get through our shields. What do we know of them?"

The screens zoomed in on the targets as the sensor officer spoke up.

"Not much sir. Their energy readings are certainly lower than ours but I am getting readings that they are not powered by Hypermatter. Energy readings are coherent to a Fusion based power source."

"Nuclear Fusion?" the Admiral grinned. "I might as well pity them and let them have the first shots."

"They are however achieving power ratings that are five times more powerful than any fusion based energy source that our records can pull up, so they might be more potent than we think." The younger officer retorted.

The Admiral looked at him before waving him off, turning to the weapons officer seated at the fore of the opposite sensor pit that Imperial warships favored for their bridge layouts.

"Lock on our main Batteries, bring them to full power. Prepare to fire on my mark."

The _Helmsman_ accelerated with a flash from its oversized engines, blue ion drives lighting up the darkness of space as the nearly five mile long wedge shaped vessel of armor and weapons turned on its axis to directly face the oncoming threats as the rocky surface of Harvest's moon spun past only several thousand miles distant as the Imperial battlecruiser hugged the moon's orbit.

"Range dropping to 70,000. Main Batteries nearly charged. Locked on to enemy warships." The weapons officer announced as the sensor officer interrupted him.

"Energy readings from the targets are increasing. Electro-magnetic

readings emanating from the bows of the ships along with smaller readings along their flanks."

"Rail-gun projectiles?" Gail asked as he stifled a laugh.

"Yes sir but already their energy levels have surpassed most knownâ€|.ENERGY SPIKE!"

Gail thundered his commands, "Shields to full power!"

"Large projectiles incoming! Impact inâ€|.Brace!" the sensor officer shouted.

Four lighter 100 ton slugs fired from the UNSC Frigates _Decatur_ and _Bellophron_ joined with two slugs from the Destroyer _Liangshon_. Composed of tungsten and softer metals, the projectiles tore through space at 7,000 kilometers per second, looking like streaking orange comets as three heavier 200 ton slugs; two fired from the Marathon Heavy Cruiser _Sevastopol_ and a single from the Halcyon Cruiser _Richelieu_, followed right behind.

The first slug from the _Decatur_ struck first, setting the forward shield's aglow as some five hundred megatons of kinetic energy expended itself against the mighty shield's of the Imperial Battlecruiserâ€|and skipped off the dorsal surface of the shields and off into space.

The remaining normal sized MAC rounds slammed into the bow shields, setting off electrical fire of energy shields as a gigaton of kinetic energy yet again expended itself on the shields, this time knocking the _Helmsman_ off of its axis as the heavier slugs hit, just as Admiral Gail stumbled as the entire ship rumbled beneath him.

Each 200 ton heavy MAC slug hit with a force of 1.4 gigatons, and they hit with a one-two-three punch right after the other.

Admiral Gail and the crew were thrown from their feet as inertial dampeners were momentarily overwhelmed with the force of the blows. The shields of the Battlecruiser were covered in light and electrical fire as they struggled to hold back the massive forces of the blows while the _Helmsman_ was knocked off course by several miles.

Yet the shields defiantly held strong.

"What the Kryff?! " Gail coughed as he got back to his feet and the crew put their crash webbing on.

"Status?!"

"Forward shields holding atâ€|." His senior officer paused for a moment as he processed the information.

"..Thirty six percent! Minor structural stress at the bow and the shields, but they are holding and slowly recharging."

Gail looked at the man with mute surprise.

"From projectile weapons? That was like we took multiple Alpha strikes from two Imperial II Class Star Destroyers!"

The sensor officer was the one to reply. "Aye sir. Those larger ships fire a more powerful round, but still those had to be projectiles massing at least six dozen tons traveling at around 7,000 kilometers _per second_. I've never heard of a projectile system thatâ€¦"

Gail cut him off, "Shields double front! Return fire!"

The weapons officer nodded as the Admiral's XO shouted yet another warning.

"Enemy ships going evasive. More weapons fire coming. Lighter projectile weapons mixed withâ€¦.. one hundred and fifty torpedoes of unknown classification!"

"Shot them down! And eliminate those ships!" Gail thundered.

Dozens of green strobes of laser fire cut into the sea of stars and blackness as five dozen of the missiles, Archer Missiles fired from the UNSC ships that were tearing through space at arcane speeds, were simply vaporized by Imperial anti fighter fire, still leaving the balance of the Fusion missiles to strike the Imperial vessel as the Archer's warhead shifted the missiles to strike the Imperial vessel from either side, a tactic used by the UNSC in order to bypass the unidirectional nature of defensive Plasma Barriers.

Meanwhile the Onager Mass Drivers of the UNSC ships, their secondary weapons, discharged and threw 500 pound slugs at 4,000 kilometers a second at the enemy. The more numerous dual Mass Driver turrets of the UNSC cruisers firing the majority of the slugs while the Marathon Class Cruiser _Sevastopol_, armed with twin dual static heavy railguns on its dorsal and ventral flanks, fired four larger 1000 pound slugs at 7,000 kilometers per second to hit with a force of 2.8 megatons per shot.

The lighter and faster slugs from the Mass Drivers and Railguns struck first, with the majority skipping off of the forward shields while the rest set the energy barrier on fire yet again as they absorbed another 100 megatons of kinetic energy.

Yet still they held.

Seconds later the remaining Archer Missiles, their number reduced to ninety, slammed into the port and starboard flanks of the _Helmsman_, _their shaped fusion warheads detonating in a stream of directed thermonuclear energy, heat and plasma; covering the Imperial vessel in brief white stars of fire and light as another hundred megatons of TNT and energy assaulted the shields. Enveloping the Imperial vessel for several seconds.

The _Helmsman_ reappeared on the screens of the UNSC ships, to the utter shock and horror of their commanders, its energy shields aglow giving the ship the look of an arrow cleaving through the heart of space as dissipating gasses and fireballs hugged its sides as the prow of the ship plowed onward.

"Shields holding at 23 Percent and rising. Minor heat bleed through on the port and starboard hull and minor damage to weapons ports A and E. Targets locked on." the _Helmsman's_ senior officer told a seething Gail.

"Return fire now!"

The Helmsman unleashed all of its destructive fury in one mighty salvo.

Eighty heavy green lances from the primary Turbo Lasers cleaved through the dark, racing towards the now wildly maneuvering UNSC warships at ten thousand kilometers a second, striking the two UNSC Frigates and the cruiser Richelieu.

The threat detectors and AI's onboard the Earth vessels had detected the threat and had moved the ship's Plasma Barriers to cover the portion of the ship's that were impacted.

The defensive barriers of electromagnetically contained Plasma and energy that had defended UNSC vessels from salvos of enemy and Rebel firepower might as well not have been there.

The first half a dozen lances slammed their mighty energies into the barriers, which held fast for a second on the lighter ships and popped with an electrical discharge as they were overwhelmed.

Highly energized gases and plasma tore through two meters of titanium-A armor like a blowtorch through tissue paper. Explosions boiled through their interiors—blasting out the aft sections, blooming with white-hot secondary fusion detonations as reactors went supercritical .

Leaving smears of fire and burning debris where a moment before there had been two UNSC Frigates.

The Halcyon Cruiser fared only a little better, its much stronger Plasma Barrier absorbing the destructive energy of the first dozen bolts meant for it, but failing soon after as the destructive power of hundreds of Megatons of heat and energy overloaded it.

Leaving another dozen energy lances to tear into the hull.

Thick two meter composite Titanitum A battle-plating valiantly held strong as untold amounts of heat and energy assaulted it, melting off into space and glowing white hot as the Halcyon Class cruiser was spun off its axis. Still, the heavy turbo laser beams' remaining energies still cleaved through, gutting the ventral section of the vessel and exposing a dozen decks to vacuum as helpless crew were sucked out into the void while the Cruiser's thrusters sputtered and fired to try and right the ship's tumble in a vain attempt to rejoin with the main UNSC fleet.

Gail grinned as two of the enemy ship's promptly disappeared from the battle screen and a third was clearly wounded.

"Finish that cruiser off! Fire again!" he roared.

The weapons officer nodded deftly.

"Aye sir."

The main batteries fired again as the secondary turbo lasers tracked the fleeing Marathon Cruiser and Destroyer, hoping to catch them as well as the UNSC captains spun their ships on their central axis

allowing momentum to carry them towards Cole's main fleet all the same, and fired a screening salvo of more Archer Missiles in an attempt to ward off fire from the wounded Cruiser as they frantically recharged their MAC guns.

The Halcyon, its hull still venting atmosphere and with most of its primary weapons offline, joined them in firing a broadside from its remaining railguns as the ship fired its emergency thrusters in an attempt to dodge the wall of energy weapons fire, the huge mass of Cruiser suddenly vectoring "down".

It was all for naught as forty heavy lances of Heavy Turbo Laser bolts struck the Richelieu as one and cleaved through it.

The cruiser's hull armor boiled and vaporized, mixed with venting oxygen and photonic pressure that blasted the flames into wavering plumes. The entire hull erupted and twisted in space as its mass was suddenly reduced dramatically while shockwaves travelled the length of its frame, blasting through bulkheads and sections alike.

The UNSC Cruiser snapped in two before its Helium boosted Fusion reactor went critical, turning the once proud warship into a brief second star in the Epsilon Indi system.

UNSC Everest

"Decatur and Bellophron are down with all hands! The Richelieu is gone! Repeat Richelieu is down!" Wein nearly shouted as another officer joined her in yelling status reports.

"Sevastapol and Liangshon are rejoining the main fleet!"

Yet another man turned back to face him at his station.

"Orders sir? Should we withdraw?"

Cole looked up from his console at the man, his normally reserved face twitching with a hint of annoyance.

"Return to your post or I will have you removed from my bridge." He sternly ordered as the middle aged man, with a bead of sweat running down his forehead, gulped and nodded, returning to his work at his consol.

Cole watched on the displays as the Sevastapol and the smaller destroyer Liangshong returned to their previous formation with the fleet.

The Fleet crossed the apogee of the curve of Harvest's moon, out of the sight line of the Imperial Battleship as the fleet's course was plotted on the screen.

The ship's AI Frost appeared at the holoprojector next to him.

"Sir I have compiled sensor readings from the fleet and those of the Sevastapol and Lianshong." The white snowflake avatar spoke as the readings and tables appeared on Cole's screen. "Also our S.T.A.R.S satellites have covered the orbit of Harvest's moon and are moving to disperse throughout the gravity well. Our laser links are now able to track the enemy warship."

The icon of the Imperial Battleship appeared on the displays, sitting on the other side of the moon and vectoring to intercept the UNSC fleet as they exited their slingshot orbit.

"Targeting with Archers are synched with the STARS satellites. We can now have Non Line of Sight Firing Ability with our missiles." Frost concluded.

Cole studied them intently as the surface of the moon spun by them.

The fleet would reappear on the other side in one minute.

"_Those shields are able to cover all sides of the enemy vessels." _He thought as he looked over the detailed readings as the initial encounter continued.

He then noticed it.

The ambient energy had increased when the weapons fire, particularly the MACs, struck, a reading that was similar to that of a plasma barrier but one thing was off.

Those readings were still focused towards the front of the enemy warship, making MAC strikes and railgun strikes less effective, but still able to cause notable increases in ambient heat and energy readings.

It could have meant a number of things, but Cole had an idea what it meant.

We can crack those shields with enough firepower, butâ€¦|

The scenario played through his head as he quickly did a series of caluclations.

He turned to his XO and the avatar of the AI.

"Split the fleet into two wings evenly. Wing One is to plot a course correction to vector A-3. Wing two is to plot an emergency course correction to B-negative 3. MAC's to full power fleetwide. Synch firing solutions to my command." He ordered.

"Aye sir."

The simulation played out on the tactical screens.

If that enemy ship stayed put this would work.

He just needed to draw it in a little bit more.

The UNSC ships fired their emergency thrusters and vectored their thrust from their main engines, flinging them onto new courses as the fleet split into two groups, one group of twenty five including the _Everest_ going "up" the curve of the moon's orbit and another twenty four going "down" the curve.

"Order all ships to fire standard Archer salvo apiece, heading on our previous vector. Mark."

Hundreds of contrails of More than a thousand missiles left their births on the UNSC Ships, crisscrossing bluish exhaust trails as they sped toward their target on the other side of the moon as they curved around it.

**ISS Helmsman**

"Enemy torpedoes incoming! Coming in from behind the moon!" The senior officer shouted as Admiral Gail looked on with mild concern.

"Shield recharging. Back to sixty five percent and climbing."

It meant one thing, he had guessed their exit vector, and their ships would be exiting their slingshot orbit only to run right into the main battery of the _Helmsman_.

"Shoot them down." He ordered as another officer shouted.

"There are too many of them! Our point defenses are swamped! Over one thousand torpedoes!"

The admiral gave the officer a look that could kill.

"Thin the damn herd anyway. Maintain position and orient us to face their exiting path. Main batteries to full power!"

The man gulped.

"Aye sir."

Hundreds of pulses of bright green laser fire cut into the wall of Archer missiles, turning nearly a hundred of them into molten debris as the hundreds of others impacted.

The deck rumbled as the UNSC missiles covered the Imperial vessels in Fire and silent Thunder, yet not one missile touched the hull of the Imperial warship.

"Shields holding at fifty six percent. Enemy fleet should be coming within our firing arc in ten seconds."

Admiral Gail grinned.

This was it. This was where he got to prove to the fleet that he was meant to be the one giving orders, not that blue skinned nerfherder.

"Fire as soon as you see them. All batteries." He ordered as anticipation built up.

The seconds passed as outside the bridge transparasteel windows the twinkling formation of lights that were the enemy fleet did not appear as they should have.

Gail never got to ask the question as his senior officer shouted from across the bridge.

"Contact! Enemy ships coming in from above us and below us on the

orbital plane!"

Gail stopped as his mind froze.

He was now in the trap.

He stuttered as he tried to give out his commands.

"..Spiâ€|Spin us around to bring both broadsides to bare on them!
Fireâ€|."

**UNSC Everest**

The Imperial warship came into view, a tiny dull grey wedge when viewed on the bow cameras sitting arrogantly where it was supposed to be waiting to pounce on where his fleet would have appeared.

A small grin appeared on Cole's lips.

"Initiate firing sequenceâ€"now!" Cole ordered.

Three distinct rumbles shook the _Everest_ as its two Heavy MACs and Single standard ventral MAC fired.

The remaining ships in Battle Group X-ray fired their magnetic accelerator cannonsâ€"Sixty nine heavy and normal sized rounds streaking through space in simultaneous lightning strikes that flashed across the short distance in space and struck the Imperial Vessel from two different directions.

The alien ship blurred behind its shields . . . opaque for a split second as the huge mass of ship was thrown off its courseâ€|

Only to be thrown directly back in the direction it just came as the second Wing of UNSC ships fired their MAC guns.

The Imperial Battlecruiser's shields shattered as Gigatons of kinetic force impacted as one.

A Dozen MAC slugs traversed the length of the once Mighty Imperial Battlecruiser, passing right through and imparting their tremendous kinetic energies as their soft shells deformed and gutted the vessel, its hull deforming and twisting for a split second and rippling like the surface of a pond for a split second before shattering.

The entire ship deformedâ€"blasted outward as the interior exploded ,and ejected a double cone of blue-white hot plasma as its reactor went critical.

The viewscreens of the _Everest_ were momentarily blinded as a new sunâ€| this one much brighter for several moments, appeared where there had not seconds ago been one of the most powerful vessels in the Imperial fleet.

The bridge crew erupted into wild cheers.

"Course correction," Cole said. "Wing One about to 060 by 030. Wing Two to 270 by 270. Reform formation Bravo â€" Theta."

"New course transmitted and acknowledged," Frost replied.

"Nowâ€|" Cole paused as he switched his viewscreen to look at the assembled main fleet of the remaining thirty eight Imperial warships hung in a triple wedge formation three hundred thousand kilometers distant.

Just sitting there.

Watching and waiting.

"Lets deal with the main fleet. Exit orbit of the moon. Take use towards that main enemy fleet."

â€|"**To be continuedâ€|.**

Please Review.

Below is a bit of history , alternate of course, for this version of the Halo Universe explaining in detail how the UNSC came to be more advanced than in cannon.

- Pre Insurrection the UNSC was enjoying an unprecedented period of peace marked only by colonization and peace, only briefly interrupted by a radical revolt on one or two newly colonized planets. In the year 2400, after two hundred years of peace, military technology had largely remained unchanged from the days of the Intersystem War and Rainforest wars of 2130 to 2150, and in some aspects dating even earlier to technology innovations from the second Cold War between China and the United States as well as the Third World War between the Russian Federated Union and NATO of the mid 21st century.

At the time space warfare largely was based upon Electron beam weaponry, Solid State lasers, and Kinetic Kill vehicles, with effective ranges of 60,000 kilometers. Railguns were only present as weapons of last resort for the very rare occurrence of close in fighting and defense as well as for use for planetary bombardment. UNSC Strategy at the time placed little emphasis on heavy armor as seen on modern UNSC ships, as only a light 20 centimeter hull of Titanium A and a secondary hull of Composite materials was the norm. The most destructive weapon systems were Kinetic Kill Vehicles, or KKV's, as these missiles were difficult to detect and shoot down and had longer theoretical range. It would not be until the advent of the Insurrection in the outer colonies in the early 25th century that a rethinking of UNSC doctrine would occur, as well as a gradual expansion of the UNSC Fleet and Marine Corps.

As the Insurrection would often be forced to make due with what weapons they had, the Rebels would turn to civilian industrial Mass Drivers originally used for mining purposes on asteroids to attack UNSC ships with much more lethal results. The turning point would occur when more advanced Room Temperature electro-magnets would be introduced, allowing for much higher velocities attained by magnetically accelerated slugs. As the Insurrection grew in severity the UNSC would move to up-armor its newer ships, adding layers of armor and moving to install more powerful Helium 3 Boosted Fusion Reactors, boosting output by 300 percent. This move to thicker armor made energy weapon only methods of warfare less effective, as this coupled with ever more powerful Plasma barriers further reduced effectiveness, forcing the need to strike a ship dozens of times to significantly damage a target.

This was when the UNSC Moved towards a largely projectile based weapon loadout.

Onager Class Railguns would become the primary armament of UNSC and Rebel ships, able to accelerate a 500 pound slug to 4000 kilometers per second, hitting a target with a kinetic energy of 430 kilotons, so powerful that for a decade from 2435 to 2445 a UNSC ship could kill any ship with just one slug, a dozen times more powerful than the most powerful Electron Beam Weapons.

However this was not to last long as technology made its ever increasing march towards advances as the UNSC battled an ever entrenched and resourceful rebellion.

In 2446 A team of UNSC scientists developed much more powerful plasma barriers, so powerful thanks to more advanced magnetic field containment that a standard ship equipped with such a Plasma Barrier could withstand dozens of hits from the most powerful Onager Mass Drivers. However it was at this point that the UNSC and UEG would realize just how corrupt and infiltrated with Rebel sympathizers one of its core Colonial administrations, the Colonial Military Authority, was. The technology was nearly immediately sold to a private dealer out from under the UNSC's nose, and ended up in the hands of the Rebels. Soon newly equipped UNSC and Rebel ships would be forced to simply blast away at each other in slugging matches not ever before seen in an effort to deplete and punch through a Plasma Barrier.

As a result the CMA would start to see its role diminished as its assess were absorbed by the UNSC slowly, an action that would result in serious blow back a decade later.

Both sides would seek a solution, and at first the same answer was used by both sides. Instead of using a highly accelerated KKV launched from a high velocity Missile, the simple solution would be to instead mount a nuclear fusion shaped charge warhead on the missile, with the hope of getting around a plasma barrier, the predecessor to the Archer Fusion missile was born.

This in turn led to a dramatic increase in Point defense technology, as more advanced and longer ranged Pulse Lasers would be added to ships to tackle a salvo of high speed missiles. The Innies lack of resources would also push them to look towards smaller ships that were easier to acquire and produce, and as such this would lead to a re-introduction of the fighter, which had languished due to the reliance of lasers, this time on a larger frame capable of mounting more powerful reactors, engines, scaled down plasma barriers of their own, multiple anti-ship missiles and importantly ablative armor resistant to all but concentrated multiple pulses of laser fire. It was at this time where the famous X Shaped Rebel "Starfuries" would be born and the UNSC Response would be created, the precursor to the Longsword series of Interceptors, the Sword Series Interceptor MK I.

In order to deal with these durable fighters, dedicated lighter Railgun based Anti Aircraft and Anti Missile Point Defense guns, or Magnetic Liner Accelerators (MLA) were introduced, capable of achieving an effective accurate range of 1,500 kilometers in vacuum and able to hit a target with pin-point accuracy thanks to AI

targeting.

By this point the Insurrection had given way to the United Rebel Front as dozens of systems openly seceded from the UEG and UNSC. After decades of trying unsuccessfully to quell the conflict with military force, the UEG decided to try and negotiate with the Rebels, now known as the URF. Some success was made in this attempt as several star systems agreed to stay with the UNSC with the promise of political reforms, but this only served to press a pause button on the conflict. It was at this point where the CMA openly revolted against the UNSC, with nearly 70 percent of its officers defecting to the URF, and more importantly taking what assets and ships there were left into URF space.

At this point in time the UNSC would turn to a radical concept for a primary weapon system that held the promise of destroying any enemy warship in a single hit with unheard of amounts of kinetic energy, the Magnetic Acceleration Canon, or MAC. Firing a huge 100 ton slug with a soft core at 7,000 kilometers per second, the huge spinally mounted weapon would punch through any Plasma Barrier and destroy a ship with 585 Megatons of kinetic energy. The UNSC at first debated on acquiring this weapon, as an entire new line of ships would have to be designed and built around the weapon. As well ethical concerns of the effect of an off target round striking the surface of a planet were raised, as the weapon would effectively render a planet uninhabitable with a couple dozen orbital strikes.. Ultimately however, the UNSC would approve the projects implementation.

It would be at the turn of the 26th century when the heads of the UNSC and the UEG realized that war could not be averted, and that this time instead of fighting an enemy that was spread out over dozens of sectors and lacking a true military, the URF now had access to a true military force of fleets and Marine forces, including large standardized shipbuilding facilities around a dozen of the more built up and populated worlds in the revolt. The current military force would not effectively get the job done, which as a result the UNSC initiated a series of massive military arms buildups.

A Third Cold War in Modern times began.

The UNSC would dramatically build up its fleet and Military as a whole, taking up projects and ideas that had not been used before due to a lack of an enemy and re-arming its entire military as defenses for worlds, particularly Earth, Mars, Reach and New Constantinople were built up with rings of the latest generation Electron Beam defense satellites and orbital defense fortresses armed with dozens of Mass Drivers for orbital defense and defense against long range projectile bombardments.

With the increase in the use of magnetically accelerated slugs with an unlimited theoretical range, it would now be common for a hostile ship to attack planets from across solar systems, which in defensive terms created an unstoppable nightmare. The answer to this problem led to the development of powerful X-Band sensor systems which could accurately track the hyper velocity slugs in space even with stellar phenomena , and clouds of cheap small tiny satellites that would nearly in-circle the gravity well of a planet equipped with miniaturized sensors to further help accurately track projectiles. This system would then be tied into the Grid of High energy Laser Pulse Satellites orbiting a planet and would with a dozen of

coordinated pulses strike the surface of the round, heating up the surface of the soft round (rounds were softer to more effectively transfer its kinetic energy to a target) , heating the surface up so quickly even with one half a second pulse that it would cause a small surface explosion and create a tiny change in the direction of the round, generally enough to deflect any round heading towards a planet. This would mean that an enemy ship or force would be forced to face a defending fleet and its defenses to get within orbit or close to orbit where this deflection tactic was not possible.

For seven years the UNSC and the URF would be in an unprecedented state of Cold War, but in the year 2507, the war would go hot. The URF launched an all out attack on Earth, but this assault would be held off by the UNSC Home Fleet and Earth Defense Grid, but not before the loss of millions of civilians in a vaporized New Dehli and the accidental destruction of an O'Neil Cylinder Colony within Earths L4 zone that was caught in the crossfire. The success of the Home Fleet, then much smaller, was due to the presence of five dozen newly launched MAC armed ships, Paris Class Destroyers (renamed in 2514 as Frigates).

However despite the UNSC victory the battle of Earth would also teach the UNSC the lesson that a more powerful permanent defense of the Home World and other major planets like Reach were needed to effectively combat enemy ships. The answer would be the development of the Super MAC Orbital defense platform, which had already been theoretically proposed but not approved.

Work forming a ring of these defense platforms, the most powerful weapon Humanity had ever devised, began in earnest, with the goal of installing an unprecedented 150 Super MAC ODP's over Earth; with dozens planned for Mars and other Inner Colonies while Reach began constructing a ring of 40 platforms to defend the fortress world.

The effectiveness of the MAC mounted on warships in essentially one shooting enemy ships was not lost to the URF either as the UNSC went on the counter attack while repelling another assault on Reach, as the Rebel forces soon would develop their own MAC guns with rebel ship designs that were similar to UNSC Destroyers, which were being pumped out as fast as the shipyards could produce them.

This actively led to a stalemate in the war for a brief period as the UNSC was forced to simply overwhelm the Rebel fleets with superior numbers as tactics threatened to return to the days when energy weapons ruled the battle and whomever got the first hit was the victor. The answer to this problem would be devised by the Rebels.

An answer to the MAC was found by URF Scientists who developed an overpowered Plasma Barrier screen that could only be fitted onto ships the size of cruisers. This Plasma barrier was effective in the fact that when activated it would not be simply placed in a flat angle, but when a MAC round was detected or fired at it the screen would be angled and pushed out in front of the ship to the maximum extent possible to maintain the field, pushing the MAC slug out of the way and deflecting it from the ship.

However this tactic was only able to be effective once, as the energy drain was immense and kinetic energy still would be imparted on a

ship, still causing minor damage to the ship and likely damaging the emitters for the defensive screen. Still even if only effective once, it would allow the ship to return fire on the offending vessel.

This system forced the UNSC to develop a heavier series of MAC gun and a new ship designed around it, the Halcyon Class Cruiser. The heavy MAC system still accelerated a huge round to 7,000 kilometers per second, but the round was larger, at 200 tons, and required a much larger system and gun, thus a larger ship. This system hit with a force of 1.17 Gigatons of TNT. This weapon and the other systems including a Plasma Barrier system like the one invented by the Rebels, required an improvement in Reactor technology.

The UNSC had ditched the early 21st century idea of using Anti Matter reactor technology on ships as Fusion powerplants grew smaller and more powerful, as although antimatter was much more efficient and powerful the danger of the system were simply too much for a military vessel. The leap forward that made the Halcyon class Cruisers (and the Marathons Classes that followed) possible was the further refinement of Helium 3 boosted Pinch Fusion reactions, which boosted Fusion Powerplants to their maximum Theoretical and realistic output.

As the UNSC began to quell one Rebellng System after the other and began effectively blockading and laying siege to the core worlds of the URF, the URF would attempt to defy their numerical disadvantage to the UNSC by building numerous small Corvette size craft with minimal crew and minimal armor that were armed to the teeth with a single MAC and as many Aries Fusion Missiles as they could carry as these acted as support for the URF's few remaining Hyperion Class Cruisers.

These swarm tactics managed to catch the UNSC flatfooted, who lost an unprecedented six Halcyon Cruisers and a Fleet Admiral along with several supporting ships and Destroyers to these tactics, as the Rebel Corvettes, though easy to kill, were even easier to replace in the much smaller Rebel shipyards and were able to be built using lower grade material.

To counter this problem as the war began to draw to a close and the last URF fleets regrouped around the sole remaining Rebellng Inner Colony with a potent manufacturing base, Venezia, in 2513, the UNSC Unveiled its newest and most powerful Human warship ever, the Marathon Class Cruiser.

Armed with Twin Heavy MAC Guns, a dozen dual Onager Mass Driver Turrets, several Heavy Railguns and thousands of Archer Missiles backed up by dozens of Point Defense lasers and 60 Helix MLA Point Defense Guns, the Marathon Cruiser was designed with the sole purpose of destroying swarms of enemy ships no matter their size.

This philosophy of a pure bred ship killer would be applied to the creation of the Midlothian Class Destroyer, which created a naming change in the UNSC as the Paris Class Destroyers were all renamed Frigates, due to their multi-role abilities.

Designed with over sized engines for maneuverability Destroyers superseded Frigates as the backbone of the UNSC Fleet. Destroyers were built for only one thing, engaging and eliminating enemy ships, as such their armor is nearly as thick as a Cruiser's, they are armed

with twin normal sized MACs and forgo any single ship or troop carrying abilities, instead backing in dozens of oversized Archer Missile batteries, point defenses Helix guns, two Onager Mass Drivers and five Shiva Vacuum rated Nuclear Missiles.

The war would draw to a bloody conclusion in 2514 as the URF formally surrendered, but not before the UNSC smashed nearly all that was left of the URF military, leaving only One Hundred ships to flee, becoming a roving pirating force that still is hunted by the UNSC at the start of the Imperial War.

It is due to the Rebellion that , ironically, with the millions of deaths suffered, advanced the UNSC and made the defender of Earth and All of Her Colonies prepared for a war against The Empire.

7. Chapter 6 Part II

**ISD Admonitor **

"Interesting. Much more potent an opponent than I would have thought." Thrawn spoke aloud as the "UNSC" Fleet regrouped into their previous formation and began approaching, using remaining momentum from their slingshot around the moon to approach his main fleet as the expanding field of debris that was once the now late Admiral Gail's warship crashed to the surface of the moon while others were flung into what would be a debris belt around its orbit.

But they were not increasing their velocity, only maintaining it.

Their commander was not about to simply rush in.

A wise opponent.

"We now have more accurate assessments on their weapons sir." Voss Parik spoke behind him as Thrawn nodded, accepting the data pad he was presented.

He scrolled through the data.

"Most impressive. They are able to accelerate projectiles in the range of one hundred tons or more to seven thousand kilometers per second. The Kinetic impact of one of those shells is equivalent to a full Alpha strike by an Imperial Class Star Destroyer." He spoke as the Chiss Admiral's glowing red eyes scanned through more of the information.

"Ahâ€¦ it seems that they have devised their own form of defensive shielding as well. Not very powerful and only able to be directed at one vector at a time yes but still able to allow them to take a few hits. An interesting use of Plasma and electro-magnetic fields. Their understanding of such technology explains their power of their Rail guns."

Thrawns chief sensor officer spoke up from behind him.

"Sir the enemy ships are holding a steady acceleration rate. 200,000 kilometers and closing. Effective combat range in three minutes and twenty seconds."

Thrawn spun on his heel, his polished black boot squealing on the deck.

"We have verified their form of communication yes?"

Parik nodded.

"Yes sir we have, We can hail them but in combat I believe they will switch to laser link communications. But they should still be able to receive on anything but the Hypercom."

Nodding Grand Admiral Thrawn strode to the comms officer.

"Open up a link, Direct it at the warship at the center of their formation. Lets gain a little bit of intel on our opponents."

The man nodded.

"It may take longer than usual but Will do Admiral."

UNSC Everest

"Order the Musashi to break off and to take half of our Longswords with them. They are to go on a positive 60 degree angle relative to the gravity well of Harvest. That carrier is too fragile to waste in direct combat and those Longswords may give us a chance to at least flank them from above. Keep me in contact with the Wink of an Eye and their payload." Cole ordered as Wien, Frost, and his command nodded and moved to carry out his tasks, the bulk of the UNSC Carrier Musashi along with three Hundred Longsword Interceptors firing their thrusters and vectoring away from the main fleet.

Cole looked sternly on the viewscreens as the enemy fleet approached rapidly.

However for what his ships were capable of, especially after a slingshot orbit, was a snails pace.

But he wasn't about to storm in and have his fleet be caught in a trap.

"Range 190,000 thousand and closing. Enemy fleet is holding position. Maximum effective weapons range for MAC's at 84,000 kilometers, maximum accurate range at 98,000." Frost called out.

The 98,000 thousand kilometer mark was the point where the firing of his primary weapons would give the enemy time to, if their sensors were anywhere as good as his, detect the thermal and magnetic bloom of his MAC's firing and with emergency thrusters get out of the way.

He didn't know how fast these Imperials were at dodging fire, but he knew their larger ships would be slower at sudden course corrections based off of the encounter with the Imperial battleship. The Everest itself and the other three dozen Battlecruisers like her were the largest realistic direct combat warships the UNSC could make that could still have any hope of dodging fire, and that was with the absolute limits of Earth engineering to make such a mass dodge and move rapidly, while the several hundred smaller Marathon Heavy

Cruisers in the overall UNSC fleet could barely dodge MAC or railgun fire at 91,000 km, his ship was pushing it at 87,000.

Engaging anything past 86,000 Kilometers with anything besides energy weaponry and Lasers was an exercise in futility, and even the largest swarm of Archer missiles could be shot down with ten thousand miles to spare by pulse lasers without having to bring the Helix MLA defense guns into play, even with their pulse ion drives impressive speeds.

Of course Cole knew the older Electron Beam weapons the UNSC had phased out half a century ago as the primary weapons had an engagement range far in excess of MAC's (USNC ships still carried one or two for use against pirate ships or lightly armored renegade civilian ships). However with the thick armor on modern UNSC warships capable of withstanding impressive amounts of damage alone those old weapons would struggle to burn through his hulls even with multiple shots rendering them largely ineffective. He could only guess how ineffective they would be now.

However there was something that Cole could do to remedy this for long enough to get off an even greater distant shot off.

And luckily for him the enemy had demonstrated at least enough of their main weaponry to him and in the UNSC's first encounter to estimate their maximum effective range to be similar to his own.

He had purposefully taken his fleet into and out of the orbit of Harvest's moon at such an angle to a point where Epsilon Indi would be at their back, carefully running the calculations that the smaller star, about three fourth's the mass of Sol yet brighter, would interfere with thermal and magnetic detection with UNSC sensors of his MACs firing; delaying detection by approximately two seconds.

This would allow the MAC slugs to cross 14,000 kilometers of space before the Imperials, so he hoped, would detect the firing and likely move to evade.

Or so he could hope.

"Set targeting range to 98,000 kilometers. Have all ships use their telescopes and laser rangefinders to select their targets and prepare to fire. No active lock on yet. Do not give them any more readings than we gave to. Passive targeting only."

Wien turned to him, a questioning look on her face.

"We can't possibly hope to hit them from this far out unless they sit there and let themselves be hit."

"I am aware of that. However that star behind us will hopefully delay their detection of our firing long enough to give us more range." The admiral replied pointing his thumb behind him to indicate Epsilon Indi.

"Yes sir."

Frost's avatar suddenly appeared beside Cole, just at the same time where the senior communications officer began shouting.

"Sir! The enemy fleet is hailing us! I cant pinpoint which ship as they are bouncing it off of every one in their fleet but I am receiving an audio and visual signal!"

It was Cole's turn to raise his eyebrows in surprise.

"They wish to talk now? And they didn't feel that the colonists on Harvest were worthy of this?"

He turned to Frost.

"Any malware or cyber attack presence?"

The avatar flashed with code as the AI replied.

"Scanningâ€|.Code is unusual but is simple, nothing more than an audio and video packet. No translation is required."

"_So they are able to translate into our language. However we finally get to see the face of our enemy._" Cole thought.

He would have been lying to think he wasn't curious as to how they looked like. If the non sentient alien life Humanity had long ago encountered during colonization had been any indicator, it would clearly be something unusual.

"Lets see the face of the enemy." Cole nodded.

"Put it on the Main viewscreen."

The stars and targeting data that had been displayed on the forward viewscreen that dominated the bridge of the _Everest _shifted.

The bridge crew gasped as Cole's irises briefly widened and one eyebrow cocked up, but unlike several of his crew he did not take a step back, keeping is arms crossed behind his back as he took a step forward.

In the middle of the screen was a man, no other way of putting it aside from being overly technical and using the word humanoid, that was dressed in a finely pressed and finished white uniform with golden shoulder pauldrons and rank designations on his chest.

Its uniform looked not too dissimilar to Cole's dress uniform, and reminded him of the old ornamental uniforms of the sea going Admirals and commanders of Earth centuries ago.

But he was not focused on the uniform.

The man had royal blue skin, a strong jaw and jet black hair that was professionally swept back.

But most surprising was the creature's human like eyes, that glowed a startling red.

Yet another surprise was the crew behind him in the unfamiliar command center of the alien warship.

His XO spoke aloud behind him. "Sir those crew behind him

are.."

"Human." Cole finished as he stepped closer again to the viewscreen, questions filling his mind more than ever.

"And you might be?"

The alien gave a faint grin, and Cole could see those strange haunting eyes studying him as Cole did the same.

For a full second the two enemies stared at each other, taking each other in.

"_Grand Admiral Thrawn of the Galactic Empire and leader of the Empire of the Hand. And you are?"_ the Imperial asked.

"_Empire of the Hand? Do they possibly subdivide their space or star-systems into spheres of influence under military control?"_ Cole briefly thought to himself while suppressing his surprise of having a conversation with his enemy as he replied.

"Admiral Preston James Cole of the United Nations Space Command and the Unified Earth Government"

The man snapped his fingers.

"_So that's what your UEG anachronism stands for. We have been trying for days to figure out that exactly means for weeks now."_ The Imperial "Grand" Admiral replied with a faint hint of suppressed humor.

Anger briefly built up within him as Cole retorted.

"You could have asked the Colonists of this world, maybe even talked to them first. Perhaps if you hadn't bombarded this world you could have learned more." Cole retorted with a dose of poison in his words.

The Imperial nodded, "Perhaps we could have, my local Commanders certainly could have dealt with the situation in a much more professional manor. It is regrettable."

Cole's fist clenched behind him.

"What are your intentions? Why are you attempting to take this system?"

The Imperial Admiral turned to one of his crew, a man in who looked in his mid thirties or forties before looking back at the screen.

"I wish to add you to the Empire, and place the UNSC under the influence of my sphere of influence." Thrawn answered a matter of factly.

"_Well that answers a question."_

"So you think we will simply stand down and let you try and rule over us? Could we not simply exist side by side in mutual agreement?" Cole asked.

He knew the answer to the question. If a state actor were going to invade your planets at will the question was a moot one, but he knew he needed to ask it directly. At the very least some politicians in Sydney and New York would be satisfied.

Thrawn paused for a second as the viewscreen briefly was awash in static from stellar interference as if mulling it over.

"I am afraid at this time no. This system is simply too valuable and your existence threatens multiple powers which you don't even know of. You must either agree to become a part of the Empire or this conversation is pointless. I admit that is a rather definite offer so you may carry this message back to your superiorâ€|."

Cole turned to Frost's avatar.

"Im done."

"Yes sir."

The link was terminated as the viewscreen reverted back to its previous view of the tactical displays and the sea of stars.

The bridge was silent.

"Range?"

"120,000 thousand sir and closing." Wien replied.

Three minutes had already gone by.

"Maintain formation."

**ISS Abmonitor **

"Well there is our answer." Thrawn sighed.

Personally, he didn't want to have to pacify yet another region of the Unknown regions. But the Emperor had gotten involved, and he had no choice but to comply for now if his plan was to continue.

However this UNSC changed things.

The civilians they had captured groundside had informed him that this UNSC was in control of at least twelve dozen star systems and some 400 worlds in this arm of the Galaxy, known to the locals as the Orion's arm.

If that was to be true then this UNSC was possibly in control of nearly six star sectors and would be larger than the Chiss Acendancy, nearly as large as the Empire of the Hand itself.

Such a power could simply not be ignored, though how an Empire full of nothing but Humans whom believed its homeworld which they had deduced to be called "Earth" was the mythical homeworld for humanity was beyond even Thrawn. That and the fact that they had built all by themselves an alternate form of Faster than Light travel was both impressive, and potentially destabilizing for his growing Empire.

This UNSC had to be incorporated into the Hand or fall into Palpatine's hands, which would likely see it destroyed and his plan to thwart Palpatine dissolved.

And with the looming threat on the horizon, all he could do would be to act now.

Thrawn turned to Parrik.

"Order the wings to prepare to receive orders and to execute on my mark. " he said as the tactical viewer outlined the perspective groups of ships.

Thrawn had arranged his ships into a triple wedge formation arranged together to form a single wedge. Each "wedge" of this formation consisted of three Imperial Class Star destroyers, four Victory Class Destroyers, four upgraded and slave circuited Dreadnaught class Heavy Cruisers, a single Nebulon B Frigate and a single Acclamator Assault Ship.

"On my mark both flanks are to accelerate to flank speed and to make a heading on a positive 30 degree vector in relation to the flagship."

That maneuver would have both wings of his formation suddenly moving out and "above", swinging his ships into a flanking maneuver that would be above the heading of the UNSC ships, allowing both groups to outflank and encircle the UNSC ships as they fired on them without worry of the UNSC fleet placing itself in between them and risking friendly fire.

The central wedge consisting of his flagship would hold its position, only throwing the ships into full reverse when the UNSC ships were encircled.

The tactic pinned on him executing it at the right moment. He would turn Admiral Cole's speed built up from its previous maneuvers against it. His ships were positioned within the neutral gravity of the colony's moon's orbital well, allowing them to sit perfectly at a standstill while the enemy fleet came at them.

However he had to order the flanking maneuver at the right time or else the UNSC admiral would notice. Due to the apparent nature of the UNSC's main weapons being spinally mounted, they would in turn spread their fleet out while keeping their bows pointed at his ships, likely turning the trap on him and encircling his fleet.

"I want the central force to hold position until further orders. Maintain formation and ready to lock on and fire." Thrawn finished as he turned to the weapons officer.

"Range to effective targeting?"

"110,000 kilometers and closing. Effective range for primary batteries 90,000 Kilometers sir. I can hit them from here but they likely won't sit still and let me."

Thrawn nodded.

"All batteries to full power. Shields to maximum. 70 percent shield

power to forward shields."

Thrawn turned to the tactical display as the angular UNSC warships plowed forward towards him, their weapons systems likely doing the same as his were.

"Lets see what you are made of Cole."

**UNSC Everest**

"Nearing targeting range. MAC's at 95 percent charge. Secondary weapons are holding charge." The senior weapons officer called out at the fore of the bridge.

Cole nodded.

"Have all ships divert power from their secondary Mass Driver batteries to their MACs and Plasma barriers. All ships prepare to initiate emergency maneuvers. Prepare for counter fire. Have the Marathon's and our own heavy Railguns fire along with our MACs, their slugs velocities is the same so they can hit them too with our MACs."

The officer and the rest of the crew nodded as they carried out their tasks.

Cole again looked at the enemy formation, still simply sitting there, unmoving.

"We passed into the L2 gravity well of Harvest and its moon." Frost called out as Preston Cole thought to himself.

"Begin the firing countdown. Roll from one minute." He ordered as a timer appeared on the top of the tactical viewscreen.

"_What the hell are you planning? Trying to lure me in?_"

Cole's battleplan was to get the first shot off, but he was likely going to be forced to take a full salvo from the Imperials in turn. His strategy was to appear like he was simply going to charge them headlong, luring them into security as they exchanged likely multiple salvos of long range fire.

Though he didn't like it, his ships would have to run the initial gauntlet of fire no matter what. Even if "Thrawn" or whatever his name was decided to throw his fleet into full reverse Cole's current velocity would likely overcome them or match them, simply resulting in a status quo of long range exchanges of fire.

However he planned on having his ships stay on their course and heading until 80,000 kilometers, likely drawing the enemy in, where Cole would order his fleet to split into three groups and spread out on three different headings, accelerating and using their momentum to outmaneuver the enemy and encircle them.

However Cole knew that his plan was founded on only what he knew of the enemy ship's performance capabilities, and that was very little.

That disturbed him.

His hope was that he could thin out the enemy ranks faster than they thinned his out.

However he was facing an enemy with superior weaponry and defensive shielding, so for all Cole cared his numerical advantage was mitigated.

"Range?"

"Just clearing 98,000 kilometers, entering the envelope of extreme weapons range." Wien replied.

Cole nodded.

"Guns: status on the MACs?" Cole asked as his eyes stayed glued to the firing countdown. Twenty seconds . . . fifteen . . . ten . . .

"Sir, MAC weapon systems are hot!" Wien announced. "Removing safeties now."

A web of trajectories crossed the map with tiny countdown times next to each.

"Fire."

"Transferring firing control to the computer," the senior weapons officer shouted. The woman punched a series of firing codes into the computer, then locked down the controls. The Everest recoiled three times and its MACs spat three bolts of thunder toward the enemy, followed a second later by three more much smaller vibrations as the Battlecruiser's heavy railguns fired.

The starboard view screen showed the UNSC Cruisers, destroyers and frigates launching their opening salvo.

Streaks of orange bolts of magnetically accelerated slugs tore through space like comets, followed closely behind by the much smaller streaks of the heavy railgun rounds fired from the heavy cruisers and Cole's flagship.

They tore towards the Imperial ships as the timer estimated the time to impact.

Three and then four agonizing seconds went by as the slugs tore through 28,000 kilometers of space.

Then the Imperial ships reacted.

The huge Imperial ships began maneuvering at alarming speeds in an effort to get out of the way, throwing mile long ships to the side and attempting to dodge the UNSC weapons fire.

However for as fast as they moved, in comparison to the speed of the MAC slugs they might as well have been sitting still.

It was too late. Cole's plan for Epsilon Indi to be behind him and delay their detection of his ship's firing worked.

The fleet's MAC rounds hammered into the Imperial lines. Shields flickered silver-blue and overloaded as the super-dense projectiles rammed into the formation; with several ships spun out of position by the impact of multiple slugs.

Several slugs were clean misses, several just clipping the shields of the enemy warships and skipping off into space.

The vast majority, however, tore into the Imperial vessels.

One of the lead Imperial Victory destroyers took a direct hit from the heavy round of a cruiser's heavy MAC, which sent the enemy ship into a lurching port spin as its shields burned with electrical fire. Cole saw the destroyer's three large engine cones flare as her commanders struggled to regain control—just as a second MAC round struck on the ship's opposite side. For an instant, the 1000 meter long wedge of warship shuddered as its shields flashed a blinding blue in electrical discharge as it attempted to hold back the attack, held position, then flexed as the hull stresses became too great and its shields collapsed. The destroyer disintegrated and scattered debris in a wide arc, pieces of ship bouncing off of the shields of its fellow ships.

A second Imperial ship—a much smaller Nebulon B frigate—was the victim of the Everest itself.

A slug from its number one heavy MAC slammed into the much lighter Imperial ship with the force of 1.4 Gigatons of Kinetic energy, setting the shields aglow for an instant as the ship's forward momentum was almost immediately stopped, with undoubtedly lethal results for its crew. The much smaller shields of the escort ship flashed out of existence with an electrical spark as the remaining mass and energy of the projectile tore into the ship, gutting it from stem to stern.

One of the Dreadnaught Heavy Cruisers at the rear of the Imperial lines was struck by no less than three MAC slugs fired from a Destroyer and a Frigate. The first slug from the UNSC destroyer Lance Held High set the shields alight with the fire of several hundred megatons of kinetic energy transfer, throwing the ship off its axis just as the second from the frigate Sao Paulo struck. The shields, already weakened flashed a brilliant blue as a hundred meters of the forward clam shaped bow boiled away from the huge thermo dynamic forces and heat transfer of the ship's own shields interacting with the slug.

The shields flashed out of existence and were overloaded just as the second slug from the Lance Held High's second MAC tracked it. Now free to hit unabated the round punched through the ship near its engines and ripped almost half of it apart as its frame mushroomed, a fireworks bouquet of shrapnel and sparks.

One of the monstrous Imperial Class Star Destroyers leading one of the flanking wing of ships was the target of two UNSC cruisers, a Halcyon and a Marathon class.

The first heavy slug from the Halcyon cruiser Midway struck first, setting the shield glow as it repealed the Gigaton level of kinetic energy that shook the 1600 meter long mass of armor and planet leveling weapons off of its heading just as the second and third

Heavy rounds from the Heavy Cruiser _Sevastapol_ struck in a one two punch. The shield flashed once, much brighter than the last as heat and energy transfer boiled the shields. A second flash as yet another gigaton level MAC strike struck the flank of the Star Destroyer, this time causing the electric energy blister to wholly block out the image of the wedge shaped enemy warship for a second.

The ship reappeared a moment later as its shields overloaded, and the remaining heat and energy unforgivingly transferred itself to the thick grey hull, gutting and melting dozens sections and bending its frame as the Star Destroyer spun sideways. Her shields stuttered once, trying to reestablish a protective screen just as the four heavy Railgun rounds struck from the Heavy Cruiser, tearing into the ship and cratering the hull, blossomed into fire and sparks of smoldering metal. The ship burned, her internal skeletal structure showing now; as it spun out of formation, just drifted out of control as secondary explosions tore through it as it began to break apart.

"Five confirmed Kills. We have hits on every Imperial ship. Two more have visual damage. Range dropping to 90,000 and closing." Frost announced as Cole winced.

That Salvo should have taken out more.

"What does it take to kill those things?" Wien breathed as the broken formation of Imperial ships reformed, leaving the wreckage of their fallen behind as two of the destroyer sized ships lagged behind with obvious damage.

"All ships maintain formation. Prepare to split up on my mark and recharge MACs and primary weapons." Cole ordered as his eyes locked onto one of the lead heavy Imperial Capitol ships.

**ISD Admonitor**

"Impact!" Parik cried out just before two of the UNSC's slugs slammed into his flagship.

Thrawn fell backwards as the _Admonitor_ groaned from the stress and energy transfer of two direct shots.

"Shields holding at Forty percent! Hull stress at maximum limits. We have heat bleedthroughs on decks 12 and 33, multiple breaches." The ship's captain shouted in alarm as warning sirens wailed throughout the bridge.

Outside the stars spun as the _Admonitor_ was knocked off its axis, the helmsman firing thrusters and their ion engines to correct their course.

"Heat bleed through?" Parik asked.

Thrawn answered him as he got to his feet.

"Our shields when being hit by such force at a single location create a thermodynamic energy transfer, resulting in massive amounts of heat buildup in an instant."

The Chiss grabbed his fallen data pad as he looked on.

"Fleet wide status!" he shouted, somewhat uncharacteristically.

"Five ships down sir. Gone with all hands. We lost the Fires of Mustafar, Empalla, Casadan and Unrelenting is just off of the screens entirely. The Destroyer Casbonere has heavy damage to its engines and is reporting that it took a projectile clean through its forward decks," the screens morphed to show the damaged Victory Destroyer, its bow mangled and the first 120 meters simply holed.

"But its captain is reporting that her weapons and engines are still online and that their port and starboard shield generators are online, but barely. They are still combat effective." Parik finished.

The screen then morphed to show one of the Acclamator Assault ships.

Even Thrawn was appalled at the damage, but was impressed that the ship was still keeping a relative pace with the fleet.

It had a hole with a diameter of ten meters clean through its ventral and dorsal flanks about a quarter of the way up its length off center on its starboard side. Its frame was clearly slightly buckled as debris escaped from the wound and tumbled into space.

The round had passed clean through, the ship actually lucky that its shields had been completely knocked down to not slow down the round as it hit from the bottom side of the ship instead of travelling its length.

"The Majestic is reporting that its shields are completely offline and that he can only get 60 percent out of the reactor. All starboard weapons are offline but his Missile Bays are still green as are port side weapons."

"Order them to go planetside and provide cover for our forces and to initiate repairs within Alpha Base's shield bubble. They wont last another hit from the UNSC."

"Aye sir."

Parik turned to Thrawn.

"They can hit from outside our range."

Thrawn shook his head.

"No their range is similar to ours. What this Cole was able to do was to fire before our sensors actively detected the threat too late for us to react and maneuver, extending his weapon's range."

His opponent had used the system's star to his advantage, allowing the star to be behind the UNSC ships had delayed the detection of the enemy fleet's firing as the computers and sensors had to filter through the stellar radiation, a process that only took three seconds but gave the rapidly moving projectiles more time to hurtle towards him.

Thrawn turned to the senior sensor officer.

"Range?"

"88,000 kilometers. In firing range."

Thrawn thought for a moment.

He needed to speed this engagement up. The quicker he killed the enemy ships the more of his would survive.

He had to accelerate his plans.

"All ships go to three quarters full. On my command Wings will carry out previous orders and the center force will go to full stop and reverse course."

Parik and the crew nodded.

"Weapons?"

"At full power." The senior weapons officer replied from his station.

Thrawn gazed at the oncoming enemy ships for a second, their weapons undoubtedly charging for another salvo as they barreled towards him on the viewscreen.

"Fire."

The Admonitor shuddered as the viewscreen was blinded by green light as the ship fired its primary heavy turbo lasers. Nearly a hundred large bright streaking bolts of green energy, plasma and light shot out from the Imperial fleet as they accelerated forward, seemingly charging headlong to meet the UNSC fleet.

It took nearly seven seconds for the massed salvo to hit the UNSC fleet.

The UNSC ships had detected the threat as their formation dissolved, angular warships firing maneuvering and emergency thrusters as they attempted to blast their ships out of the way.

An alarming amount of the bolts missed, shooting past wildly maneuvering UNSC ships and off into space to eventually dissipate

However just under half of the Imperial beams and comets of hellfire didnt.

The UNSC's ships directed their defensive barriers to cover the fore of their ships, angling them to further deflect the plasma away from their hulls as the remaining Turbo Lasers slammed into them.

Each turbo laser bolt carried at least a hundred megatons of power, and the Plasma Barriers of the UNSC vessels flared brilliant as they struck.

Several of the barriers collapsed almost instantly on several of the

lighter UNSC ships as the heat and energy destabilized their magnetic containment fields, allowing several of the streaks of energy to burn into their vulnerable armored hulls.

Two UNSC Paris Class Frigates were struck by eight direct blasts apiece. The frigates' barrier heated a brilliant red, dispersing the first two bolts of superheated ionized gas as the barriers wavered in and out of existence, the magnetic fields losing containment as the ships shuddered. The third and fourth strike of heavy turbo laser fire burned through and hit bare hull, melting the shield arrays and sensors, boiling away layers of titanium battle plate into space. The other four slammed into them as one. The UNSC ships appeared frozen in time for a momentâ€| before the energy tore through their hulls, blasting internal decks to atomsâ€" amidships, and then the fusion reactorsâ€"shattering the ships into a haze of glowing particles.

The Marathon cruiser Leviathan was the unlucky to be the target of the full alpha strike of a Victory Destroyer, 30 Green comets of gases and plasma slammed into the cruiser before it could maneuver out of the way. Its Plasma barrier, an order of magnitude more powerful than those on the lighter frigates and destroyers, shrugged off the first dozen direct hits before its containment field failed. The two meter thick battleplate held the attack for a moment as the Leviathan took a direct hit on her port side. Plasma etched through the meters of titanium-A armor plating like a blowtorch through rice paper, and her center amidships decks vented and burned as several of her turrets were melted away.

The UNSC destroyer Glasgow Kiss was knocked clean out of formation the narrow craft as dozen bolts from Thrawn's own ship tracked it, blasting through its plasma barrier as the remainder of the salvo from the Admonitor tore into it, melting through armor in an instant. The Glasgow Kiss spun out of formation with its engines nearly severed from the rest of the ship spewing silent explosions and atmosphere before its reactor went critical. The port side of the ship bulged outwards for a full second in a surreal display before the ship cracked in half, both parts spinning different directions.

Another ship a Destroyer, the Herodias â€"was severed amidships by another Imperial Class Star Destroyer as it moved to cover the wounded Leviathan. The aft section of the ship continued to thrust forward, her engines still running hot right past the Halcyon Cruiser Jubilation as it was struck, melting off layers of armor and exposing decks as and her foredecks burned.

The UNSC flagship, the Everest, was hit multiple times on its defensive barrier, but it held strong even as a lucky turbo laser beam melted armor off near her engines.

"Six Confirmed kills, mostly the lighter ships sir. We damaged severely one of their capitols and damaged two more ships." Thrawn's gunnery officer announced as six of the UNSC ships winked off of the display.

"They are maneuverable; we have to close the range so we can eliminate more of their ships." Thrawn thought aloud.

"Range down to 78,000 kilometers and closing." Parik replied.

Thrawn ran a series of calculations on his data pad, and then rechecked them.

"Get ready to initiate our maneuver, full charge on our guns and fire again when ready."

**UNSC Everest**

Reports flooded into the bridge of the flagship.

"_Leviathan_ sustained major damage, starboard Mass Drivers, Archer Missile Pods and ventral railguns destroyed!"

"_Enid_ and _Warspite_ are down with all hands!"

"_Glasgow Kiss_ was split in two!"

"Destroyer _Lance Held High_ has moderate damage to lateral surface and multiple exposed decks. Its number two MAC is out of action!"

"Cruiser _Yamato_ reports ventral batteries are gone or down! Venting affected areas!"

Cole jotted down calculations . . . and frowned.

"Damage and casualty report, sir." One of his adjutant officers offered him a data pad.

Cole waved it away.

He already knew he had lost six ships and thousands of crewmen in addition to the three previous ones.

"Status of MAC's? he asked as the bridge's flurry of activity only increased.

"Nearing seventy percent and climbing. " Frost replied.

"Arm Archer Missile Pods. Our Mass Drivers will not do enough damage to them anyway."

"Aye sir. Range closing to 70,000. Enemy fleet is advancing. Holding Formation." The AI replied as the viewscreen switched to show the Imperial fleet suddenly accelerate forward at impressive speeds, holding their formation as they charged their weapons.

Cole would have to execute his maneuver much sooner than he had wanted, but he could still get another salvo off before he did so.

"I've got a hard lock throughout the fleet with our Archers sir!" Wien half shouted from the rear of the bridge.

"Launch them. Frost I want our fleet to fire our MACs at a point where they impact 0.1 seconds after our missiles. Make it happen." Cole responded as he ran calculations on his data pad.

It should work.

Frost's avatar nodded in understanding as code ran down his snowflake like avatar.

"Sequences input. Firing Archers."

Hundreds of Archer Fusion missiles shot from their pods and accelerated towards the enemy as the wave of missiles lanced towards the oncoming constellation of Imperial warships.

Pulse lasers and plasma blasts snapped to existence as scores of missiles were felled by the enemy ships, but as Cole had suspected, their point defense capabilities were not as terrifying as their offensive weaponry.

The Balance of the megaton yield missiles were going to strike home.

"Firing MACs."

The prows of the UNSC ships flared as their Magnetic Accelerator cannons fired.

Lines of flame and superheated slugs crossed the space between the two forces.

However as soon as the UNSC fired their slugs Frost bellowed out another alarm.

"Energy spikes! Enemy warships returning fire!"

Plasma and fire erupted from the Imperial fleet, a wave of green energy that looked like a solar flare as it boiled through the vacuum of space toward the UNSC ships.

Cole was already spitting the orders to go evasive out of his lips as Frost reacted, firing the Everest's emergency thrusters and nearly throwing Cole and everyone to the deck as the inertial dampeners were nearly overwhelmed with the sudden course correction.

The vacuum between the two opposing forces filled with a hundred lines of fire and smoldering metal that seemed to tear through the fabric of space.

Their trajectories closed on one another, then crossed, and the bolts of fire grew larger on the main screen.

The Imperial Ships made no attempt to dodge as they focused their shields forward.

Cole smirked.

Just what he wanted them to do.

As the remaining Archer missiles closed to their targets with only seconds from impact, their smart warheads having been assigned to certain ships in flocks of destructive missiles; they suddenly veered to the flanks of the Imperial warships, shooting past their forward shields before in an incredible display of maneuverability turned to slam into the flanks of the Imperial warships. A function that the

UNSC had long included in their missiles to overcome Rebel Plasma barriers.

The flanks of the enemy warships that were less heavily shielded as their commanders focused their energy shield's powers towards the front, confirming the energy readings Cole had reviewed.

Hundreds of missiles slammed into the Imperial warships, each Archer's warhead detonating in a cone of focused fusion gas and plasma, directing its full double megaton yield inward at the enemy ships, covering them with fire and silent thunder as the Imperial vessels disappeared behind their shieldsâ€¦..

Just as the MACs impacted.

The first victim which was one of the larger Imperial Class Star Destroyers, its shields fighting back a hundred Archer missiles as its already reconstituted shields were slammed into by two normal sized MAC slugs and a single Heavy MAC round. Its shields were nearly immediately depleted shields as one of the shield domes blew out from the stress as the first 400 meters of the bow simply ceased to be while the amidships were tore apart in a cascade of secondary explosions before the aft engine compartment blew out in a jet of plasma.

Two MACs sliced through an already wounded Victory Destroyer, gutting it from bow to stern in the process. Another Dreadnaught Heavy Cruiser received a slug through its main core, splitting it in two before it turned into an eye watering explosion. Seven MAC rounds struck the two ships in the Imperial line a Victory Destroyer and another Star Destroyer, shattered their shields, dented the armor, and pounded through hulls, sheering off the command tower of the Star Destroyer and sending the Victory into a spin as its engines overloaded in an attempt to try and right its course.

The remaining Imperial Escort Frigates simply disappeared into debris clouds as nearly all the other Imperial ships emerged from the hail of fire with some form of mild to moderate damage as their shields slowly crackled back to life

Twenty Four Imperial ships remained, eight Heavy Cruisers, Eight Victory Destroyers, Six Star Destroyers and two Assault Ships.

Cole however didn't have the time to take this in as the Imperial Turbo Lasers plasma tore into his fleet.

The results were much more dramatic.

Plasma Barriers over the fleet rippled with fire as a dozen instantly failed.

Four frigates simply exploded as the bolts pounded through the armor to devastate the interior of the ships as fire ripped their lengths before several split open and tumbled out of formation as expanding fields of debris.

Two more destroyers either were holed, spun out of formation belching flame or turned into a brief star as their reactors went critical while turbo lasers ripped through them.

The wounded Marathon Cruiser _Yamato_ was struck by no less than four dozen hits from a Victory and an Imperial Star Destroyer. Its Plasma Barrier simply flashed out of existence and its armor was boiled away. Plasma lance through its interior as escape pods tore away from it, just before its frame was sliced in two and the mighty UNSC Heavy cruiser was torn asunder in hellfire.

At the same time the Halcyon Cruiser lurched to the side as plasma bolts cut through her like a scythe, ignoring her plasma barrier and burned through two meters of ablative armor, and a dozen decks as if they were non-existent. The cruiser began to roll as its power plant was cut before another flurry of turbo lasers found the ship's helium three boosted reactor. The ship seemed to bulge outward for an instant before light enveloped it, the UNSC ship turning into an artificial nebula of gases and debris.

**ISD Admonitor**

Thrawn ignored the damage reports as he focused on the enemy, tasting copper in his mouth from where he bit his tongue after being thrown again to the deck as the flagship was struck yet again.

Thirty four UNSC ships emerged from his salvo, several trailing debris as the UNSC flagship remained, another blackened scorch mark of a hull breach on its starboard side.

"Sir we are closing to forty thousand kilometers!" Parik shouted as Thrawn's peripheral vision caught the tumbling mass of one of his gutted Victory cruisers hurtle through formation alongside him, its momentum keeping the destroyed ship going all the same.

It was now or never.

He had to destroy them before they destroyed him, that coordinated Missile Strike had surprised him and nearly batted down his own ship's shields like several other less fortunate casualties.

This opponent had proven to be capable, more so than he had even given credit to, and he mentally panned himself for underestimating them. He had acted like so many lesser arrogant Imperial Commanders and had paid for it.

"Execute!"

**UNSC Everest**

Cole looked at the display screens with concern as damage reports scrolled down beside him.

The flanks of the Imperial formation shot forward and "up" at alarming speed while the center of the Imperial battlesquadron suddenly began cutting its momentum.

"Sir the enemy fleet is moving to a position to encircle us." Frost replied as the tactical screens morphed to show the icons of the enemy ships, with two pincers moving to outflank his ships as his shot forward. The enemy would have declination above his fleet, with free ability to fire on his ships from both sides with no concern of striking their own ships.

The distance between his fleet and the enemy was now closing by the second, and with his ship's momentum already built up and the Imperials having accelerated, he had few options.

He could order a full stop, but that would still leave him encircled and sitting ducks.

He could order the fleet to go evasive and spread out, loosing the formation and trying to encircle the encirclement.

He ran the simulation on his data pad.

No. It wouldn't work in time with his ships built up speed.

His mind searched for options.

"Enemy ships are building up ambient energy! They are preparing to fire!" Wien shouted with growing concern in her eyes.

Motes of green light collected along the Imperial ships' lateral lines.

He was trapped.

Thrawn had encircled him.

If he was going to have the tables turned on him, the only option was to not do the predictable.

Thrawn wanted him to try and exit his pincer, for he knew he would fail.

"Orders sir?!" his officers asked with growing alarm.

Preston Cole exhaled.

"Input new orders to fleet."

__**To be continued.**__

__**Please Review.**__

8. Chapter 6 Part Three

****Hey everybody!****

****This story is not dead! Repeat, not dead!****

****Sorry for the delay, but I've just finally graduated College and with finals, graduation, and the beginning of the "Great Career starter" hunt writing this took a LONG time.****

****Anywayâ€¦.****

****For the LOVE OF GOD PLEASE REVIEW!****

****(No seriously I like to know your thoughts and opinions, I enjoy feedback.)****

****Here you goâ€|****

ISD Admonitor****

"Full powered alpha strike ready in twenty seconds. UNSC ships are holding velocity. I have positive targeting locks throughout the fleet!" Voss Parrik cried shouted as the klaxons endlessly wailed the call to battlestations.

"Turn those blasted things off." Thrawn ordered to one of the crew, muttering a string of curses in Chiss that would have made a member of his race's blue skin blush red.

The officer in question, a young woman whom had managed to beat out Imperial sexism towards female military members nodded.

"Somehow they are jammed on from the sudden hull stress! I can reset the systemâ€|.but that will take five minutesâ€|" the woman, a brunette Corellian in her mid-thirties paused mid-sentence before pulling off her crash webbing and sliding out her blaster pistol from its holster, causing the two Stormtroopers at the rear of the bridge to tense up, and aimed it at her console, one of the many that oversaw the damage control of the vast Star Destroyer.

A single blaster bolt shot out, melting the console and silencing the endless wail.

"Done sir." The officer replied as she calmly got back into her seat, gaining an incredulous look from Thrawn and Parrik.

Thrawn turned back to take in the situation.

The UNSC fleet was all but helpless now, their built up speed and momentum all but carrying them into all shooting gallery.

Right now he was watching the forward Viewscreens as the red icons of the remaining UNSC ships began to overlap the green targeting icons of his fleet's main turbo lasers, targeting data streaming down on the side as a countdown timer ticked down from thirty.

It was soon about to be over.

The main weapons on the remaining Star Destroyers, Cruisers and Dreadnaught Cruisers began to burn a bright green against the blackness of space as they charged to their maximum power, their barrels and magnetic fields tracking towards the fleet of offending UNSC ships which had managed to mangle nearly half of the Imperial fleet.

Targeting matrices began to attain their shrill lock on tones as the UNSC ships, to the naked eye a twinkle of stars in formation, were soon to be extinguished with countless megatons of energy and hellfire.

Thrawn dared to purse his lips into a smile as his crew on the Admonitor carried out their tasks with the upmost sense of professionalism that made the Chiss admiral proud.

"Alpha strike in Fiveâ€|Fleetwide firing slaved to our computers," Parrik called out along with the senior targeting

officer.

"Four."

The countdown seemed to stretch into hours.

"Three."

"Twoâ€|.Enemy fleet rapidly accelerating!" Parrik cried.

The engine blocks of the UNSC ships exploded with fire and light, sending the blocky human warships spearing through space at increasing velocity.

Thrawn furrowed his brow as he crossed his arms.

"Fire!"

The Admonitor seemed to buckle and vibrate under the Grand Admiral's feet as its twelve dual heavy turbo laser batteries unleashed their fury at the enemy targets as the forward viewscreen polarized for an instant against the blinding green solar flare of weapons fire.

Green lances of fire and energy cleaved through the darkness of space like a scythe as his flagship's fire joined that of his fleet, lines of fire and plasma tearing away from their weapons ports and stitching a line towards the UNSC fleet.

At this range it would take only seconds for them to hit, but the UNSC ships, spearheaded by his adversary's flagship, kept increasing their velocity even more as the two forces barreled towards each other.

"He is going to try and drive right through my formation," Thrawn thought, such a maneuver being the only realistic way to escape an encirclement.

However such a maneuver would still see the enemy fleet running a gauntlet of fire, which they would be unlikely to survive.

Regardless the enemy warships continued accelerating, allowing Thrawn a moment to realize that their built up speed had been a bluff as the enemy ships had apparently only entered into their slingshot maneuver at roughly half of their available speed.

Still it would likely be for naught.

The timers and targeting matrices on the viewscreen highlighted the wave of turbo laser fire and tracked his weapons progress as they tore through tens of thousands of kilometers of empty space in mere seconds.

"Impact in three seconds. A quarter of our fire will be evaded." The senior weapons officer called out as Thrawn's eyes stayed glued to the displaysâ€|

Just as the flanks of the UNSC ships seemed to be covered in gases and clouds of smoke.

A wall of torpedoes erupted from the enemy warships, and immediately tracked towards a bath that would see their majority cover the flanks of the UNSC shipsâ€right towards the wall of fire that was coming in from the Imperial's flanking ships.

The blue ghostly contrails of the missiles contrasted for all but two seconds against the scythe like flare of green hellish energy as the paths of two walls of weapons fire intersected.

In an instant dozens of small new stars appeared, their fireballs consuming and enveloping the solar wave of the turbo laser bolts.

**UNSC Everest**

"Reactors to one hundred and twenty percent. Activate emergency thrusters on my go. Set course toâ€." Cole paused as his crew did not pause with him at their consoles, carrying out their tasks despite the Damoclean like specter of instant death in combat as the _Everest's_ primary AI frost and the secondary Combat Intelligences, or CI's, coordinated their efforts of maintaining a slave link to the remaining ships in the battle fleet as they tore through space at maximum speed, approaching a velocity of one hundred kilometers a second and still climbing thanks to their slingshot orbit.

"..Set collision vector towards the center Imperial squadron." Cole finished as the holographic and V3D displays outlined the targeting flight path, stitching a line in space directly into the central formation of Imperial Warships, now alone as the enemy ships flanking and threatening his ships were tens of thousands of kilometers distant.

His XO didn't even turn to question his actions, Wien having already come to a likely similar conclusion as she coordinated the damage control teams of repair drones and their fewer human counterparts in repairing the damage the flagship had already sustained.

They would soon be much busier.

"Aye sir. Course locked in." Frost replied as the helmsman acknowledged with a curt nod.

The deck shook as the ships helium three boosted pinch fusion reactors unleashed their full energies, an untold amount of thrust igniting from the main thrusters while a noticeable tug of gravity towards the stern creeping in on Admiral Cole and the crew as the inertial dampener systems were overworked with the sudden acceleration.

The thirty six UNSC ships tripled their speed as their engines burned bright white, the ships looking like comets bursting into existence as they shot forward.

"Enemy targeting sensors has us tagged sir! Energy signatures and heat profiles suggest immanent attack! Full alpha strike." Frost called out.

On the viewscreen the flanks and weapons ports of the Imperial warships were burning bright green, their hellish energies burning

into the blackness of space even on the viewscreens.

Cole peered down at his data pad.

"_Well there is no time to run another check on these calcsâ€¦| "_

"Frost..sync to my data pad and pull up these calculations, ready firing solutions on my mark."

The avatar of the AI pulsed with code for a brief moment as the Artificial Intelligence ran the code and made likely corrections millions of times.

"Interesting, fleetwide sensor returns might postulate these calculations. The question is how much yield will be needed to destabilize the magnetic containment fields."

"That's why I'm using a third of our stocks." Cole replied with a grin.

The AI clearly didn't catch any possible humor.

"Aye sir. Will fire when enemy salvo is away, setting detonation to point five zeroâ€¦|" Frost replied as a shrill alarm wailed through the bridge.

"Enemy alpha strike incoming! Estimated impact in six seconds!"

The Imperial warships flanks were enveloped in light, a wall of plasma lances streaking out towards the UNSC fleet from the three Imperial squadrons in a cascade of violence.

"Launching." Frost called out as dull popping sounds were faintly heard as three dozen of the powerful Shiva Nuclear Torpedoes tore away from their hot launched pods on Cole's remaining ships and arched away, their number halving themselves as they split themselves into two different headings, each flock of missiles targeting an invisible location in space where they were ordered to detonate.

In under three seconds they reached that target and detonated.

Right at the location where the Imperial lances of turbo laser fire was calculated to cross.

Hundreds of deadly comets of energy streaking UNSC ships at a fraction of the speed of light were all but enveloped on the sensors by the nuclear explosions of the 500 megaton suns of the Shiva Enhanced Hydrogen Fusion Torpedoes that suddenly burst into existence.

Having detonated a mere five thousand kilometers from the Earth warships, a wave of Radiation and more importantly Electro-Magnetic Pulses slammed their invisible forces onto the UNSC ships.

Power fluctuated throughout the Frigates, Destroyers and Cruisers as the systems were briefly scrambled but cycled through a full systems check in a mere second, a feat accomplished no thanks to the warship's primary AI's and CIs working in concert.

Just in time for Admiral Cole to order the remaining ships to overload their Plasma Barriers full forward.

Cole watched on the viewscreen impassively as the firestorms and plasmatic nebula like storm of a wall of nuclear hell in vacuum expanded, just as the storm of Imperial Plasma and weapons fire from the two flanking Imperial squadrons intersected them.

They disappeared into the expanding and wavering field of intense localized radiation, heat, and the brief Electro-Magnetic storms, and didn't make it through.

The magnetic containment fields faltered and dissipated, releasing the contained storm of plasma and energy into space, which all but turned into brief clouds of gases that looked like brief flares on the battlescreen.

His theory proved correct, and the most dangerous parts of the three pronged Imperial Alpha strike were negated, meaning that the third fusillade of enemy weapons fire from the central Imperial squadron, which Cole was now charging headlong, was met by the unidirectional protective screens of contained Plasma walls, overcharged as the UNSC ships routed all but the most essential power aside from the engines was directed towards them.

The lances of brilliant green city leveling turbo laser fire slammed into the fleet as the thirty six UNSC warships disappeared into the green wave of blinding green light and energyâ€|

â€|.And thirty one screaming Earth Warships came streaking out.

Another one of his Marathon Cruisers was gone. The Andrea Doria had taken almost two dozen heavy turbo laser lances, some undoubtedly from the enemy flagship, coring through her length and piercing through her protective screens. The expanding gas, pressure, heat and thermal shock immediately eliminated nearly a quarter of the Cruiser's mass in a flash as the decompression and deceleration atomized yet another quarter. The burning stern of the vessel spun out of formation as it tore itself apart into nothing more than deadly oversized shrapnel.

One of the six remaining Halcyons had been turned to slag, its plasma barrier pierced and its foredecks aflame as its MAC and primary weapons system that were not destroyed were knocked offline along with its engines; its great mass being blown off course as the bridge was taken out by a direct hit. The remaining Biosigns of the crew had been halved as escape pods began to tear away from its ruined mass.

The Everest herself had not come out unscathed. Her ventral regular 100 ton MAC was gone along with one of her three twin heavy railgun mounts and about fifty crew from the ventral decks. Leaving her with her two heavy 200 ton primary MACs.

Cole coughed as he spat droplets of blood onto the deck while regaining his footing, having nearly bit his right cheek open as the impacts threw him and any crew not strapped in to the decks.

A quick small dose from his spinal inserts of localized painkillers

made sure that he ignored the pain.

"Damage and status report!"

"MAC number three is gone and we have hull breaches on decks one through nine, sealing and venting atmosphere. Plasma Barrier emitters recycling and cooling down. Hull stress within tolerable limits, but our Reactors are now five minutes from overload."

Cole nodded, reading over the reports from the two Frigates and a destroyer that had also gone down with his two cruisers, noting that only twenty of the crews had managed to make it off in their escape pods before being consumed by fire, ripped apart by explosive decompression, flattened by overpressure or flung out into space.

Cole gritted his teeth, ignoring the klaxons wail.

They should have all been dead.

It had been a gamble, but the one thing that could render UNSC Plasma Barriers inert without massive firepower was directed EMP. Of course due to the nature and power of the defensive system it would take incredible amounts of EMP from close range to do the job and interfere with the magnetic containment, one of the reasons vacuum enhanced nuclear missiles were still even used in the twenty sixth century.

The true nature of the Imperial weapons were still unknown, but the very presence of plasma within the lances of energy meant that a magnetic field had to be present, and that a tactic as such wasâ€¦possible._

He had eliminated a threatâ€¦for now, but that wouldn't last long, and he still was staring down the central, and most intact and powerful, Imperial squadron while hurtling at them at flank speed as their weapons batteries surged with energy for another massed shot. In less than a minute the Imperial ships that were on his fleet's flanks would be behind him, ready to blast him from behind as the enemy warships, led by the massive wedge shaped capitol ships, began to cut their thrust and track them as the UNSC ships hurtled past tens of thousands of kilometers distant.

He needed to deal with those opponents while he could.

Cole looked at the tactical display again, and zoomed out from a localized view.

The lone carrier, the Atlas class _Musashi_, as well as nearly all of her Longsword Interceptors plus several squadrons from the fleet and _Everest_ herself, hung "above" the immediate battlespace on the edge of the Harvest lagrangian point, untouched.

Some two hundred plus Interceptors loaded with capitol grade anti shipping Havok Nuclear Missiles and enough Rail Cannon rounds and AGSM Fighter missiles to cut through any fighters like a scythe and threaten to at least harass the flanking Imperials enough to buy him time.

That was what he was fighting forâ€¦time.

Cole turned to the amorphous form of Frost, ignoring the controlled chaos of the bridge crew and their attendant CI's.

"Get me link to Captain Mitchel. Tell him we need those interceptors now. And get our MAC capacitors charged."

The AI nodded as the lines of code spun, and an affirmative beep acknowledged.

"Done sir. Longswords are accelerating. Targeting flanking enemy ships. ETA three minutes to optimal attack range."

On the battlescreens and V3D displays the life-like representations of the slick and angular wedge shaped interceptors all lit their twin fusion-ion drives and began tearing towards the enemy ships.

"Give me full charge on fleet wide MACs ASAP Frost. And when you detect those Imperials firing launch our Shivas on an intercept vector." Cole ordered as he watched the interceptors accelerate and close the distance to the Imperials.

"Aye sir. MAC capacitors charging to sixty percent and climbing. Shiva stocks at sixty percent. Estimate two more salvos that are able to be intercepted. However if enemy ships begin firing at will we will be unable to intercept. Range dropping to below thirty thousand kilometers to collision with central enemy squadron."

Wien returned to his side, a look of exasperation crossing her face as the Sensor Officer called out in alarm.

"Enemy ships launching single ships—estimate eight..no—ten wings of enemy fighter craft!"

Cole's gut cought in his throat.

"_Ten wings?_"

The UNSC organizational doctrine was that a full strength squadron was Eight Longswords, and that five squadrons was a wing, for a total of forty Interceptors. Given that a UNSC Carrier could carry five wings, the Imperial capital ships had to carry at least fifty craft alone apiece.

"They are small by the looks of them, unknown configuration, moving to intercept."

Cole expanded his field of view on his data pad, expanding the battlespace.

He had to try and guess a location where the flanking Imperial ships would be—something that would be nearly impossible given the variables.

However there was the immediate concern of the enemy squadron his ships were hurtling towards.

He turned to his senior Weapons Officer.

"Target Archers at central force. Empty a third of our tubes and spam

them."

**ISD Admonitor**

"Weapons salvo impact inâ€|.Negativeâ€|repeatâ€|negative on confirmed hits on targets from 2/3rds of our weapons fire!" called out the weapons officer from the console pit as Thrawn watched the two wave like salvos of turbo laser lances from his flanking squadrons shoot into the expanding plasmatic nebula of the massed thermo nuclear fireâ€|and not exit on the other side.

Still the brilliant energy lances from his squadron and flagship struck home, coring into yet more enemy ships. A salvo strike from the _Admonitor_ herself struck and vaporized half of one of the UNSC capitol ships, sending its exploding mass careening away in a cloud of shrapnel as another enemy capitol ship was immolated and sliced open along with three more of the lighter ships by his central squadron's fire. The UNSC flagship was now visibly damaged, with a large part of her ventral mass alight with fire as debris tumbled away.

Yet still the enemy fleet was alive, and it was charging directly at _him._

Voss Parrik gasped beside him.

"How the hell did they do that!?"

Even Thrawn was stunned for a moment, picking up his data slate he reviewed the sensor readings, and rechecked them as more of his officers yelled out status updates.

"_No..they couldn't have. No one has seen those sort of weapons sinceâ€|the Mandalorian Crusadesâ€|"_ he thought to himself as the realization dawn on him.

"Ingeniousâ€|" Thrawn muttered aloud as he turned to his questioning senior officer.

"They used a massed barrage of Thermo-nuclear weapons."

Parrik paused as his mind visibly raced, as if he was having to pull the clearly forgotten information from the bowels of his impressive mind.

"â€|You mean nuclear weapons? Those haven't been seen in the galaxy in any appreciable numbers inâ€|what, two millennia?"

Thrawn nodded.

"Yes. The Mandalorians were the last. They are primitive weaponsâ€|but given what we have witnessed so far today primitive does not mean ineffective, and even so they may not be as primitive as they seem to us. We still do not know how they achieve the power and velocity of their rail-cannons which are in excess of what we know. And those nuclear blasts were in excess of 300 megatons in powerâ€|.in vacuum." The Admiral finished as he let those words sink in.

Parrik shook his head.

"If I remember correctly they are deemed hazardous because of large amounts of lethal radiationâ€|but that wouldn't have stoppedâ€|." His XO paused for a moment as realization dawned on him.

"EM Pulse at close range."

Thrawn nodded as he turned back to the viewscreens.

"Yes. This Admiral Cole figured outâ€|maybe by luckâ€|that massed Electro magnetism will disrupt turbo laser bolts magnetic bottle fields, rendering them inert."

The senior sensor officer broke into the conversation.

"Sir the enemy is on a collision course! Dropping to 28,000 kilometers and closing rapidly! Enemy starfighters are closing in on our flanking squadrons."

Thrawn let out a muttered curse, "Bring up that carrier vessel that separated from the main group."

The screens morphed to show the visual of the blocky UNSC carrier ship, maintaining a holding pattern "above" the battlespace by nearly 150,000 kilometers, giving it plenty of time to move away from any attacks by his ships yet close enough to launch its fighters.

The few fighters that had managed to come in on the sensors...a fact that meant that they had a passive ability to defeat sensors to a significant degree, at least from long rangeâ€|went against everything Thrawn had ever known about starfighter doctrine.

They were huge.

Easily twice or three times the size of those accursed Alliance X-Wings, the angular and predatory wedge-shaped craft dwarfed his TIE Interceptors and Bombers. However the few fleeting returns and images they had gotten of them were more than enough to surprise. They clearly had two huge engines that propelled them to respectable velocities, and moved at an agility that belied their size.

The UNSC fighters were rapidly accelerating, cutting into the distance between the two forces as the wall of screening TIE Interceptors sped to intercept from the now trailing squadrons that were turning to try and keep up with the careening UNSC ships.

Although Thrawn was somewhat concerned, starfighter combat was neither his forte nor his concern, it was the fleet of enemy ships screaming towards him.

"Order ships to switch to independent firing. I want all ships with Proton torpedoes to fire on my mark." Thrawn ordered as the distance between the two forces dropped to 25,000 kilometers.

A new warning wailed as viewscreen exploded with new contacts, yet more missiles from the UNSC ships tearing away from their tubes and screaming in towards them.

This time there was a proverbial wall.

"Intercept them!" Thrawn roared as his squadron's defensive anti fighter batteries stuttered to life.

Dazzling quick pulses of greenish strobes of light and fire stitched a line in the dark, knocking down barely a quarter of the missiles before they tore into the reconstituted shields of his ships with fire and silent thunder.

The Imperial warships reappeared from the plasmatic clouds of explosions, their shields covered in electrical fires as the energy blisters burned white, hugging their forms as the grey daggers of the star destroyers cut through the clouds of dissipating gases like a spear into the heart of space itself.

On the bridge of the Admonitor Admiral Thrawn clinched his fists as his XO cried out that their shields were holding at thirty percent and that the dreadnaught cruiser Thestia had its shields blown out.

"Enemy ships passing twenty thousand kilometers!"

Thrawn all but roared, "All ships fire at will target at your discretion!"

****GA-TL1 Longsword Interceptor****

**** Flight Lieutenant James Gordon****

****Call Sign "Slayer 1"****

"I've got tone! AGSM Missiles locked!" Slayer 1's wingmate called out as his viewscreens and V3D HUDs gave a shrill tone of lock on as three of the 400 Imperial fighters on his screen had the white box that designated them turn Red and targeting data streamed across the virtual reality world that Flight Lieutenant James Gordon piloted his deadly Interceptor in.

His neural uplink literally connected him to the fighter, allowing him to perform even the most complex tasks and even fly the fighter by thought, however nearly all pilots still manually piloted the fighters with the good old manual control sticks and throttles, which most believed to be more efficient.

"Hold fire until my command." he ordered his squadron as the twin underbelly weapons pods full of AGSM-8 anti fighter missiles went active indicated that their targets, three of the strange "eyeball-like" Imperial fighters, were locked in.

There were so many unknowns, like the range of the enemy weapons, their speed and agility, and if they had energy shields or not.

He did not like this one bit.

He pushed the thoughts from his mind as he focused on the enemy ahead, now closing in past six thousand kilometers and streaking towards the block of Longsword Interceptors, which were arranged in squadrons of Eight with a mile of spacing apiece.

The organization of the enemy fighters however, was more of a simple

herd, most of them packed in close together.

"Double check your locks. Lets thin out the herd!" he ordered as the distance closed to 6,000 kilometers and dropping at an alarming rate as the Longswords burned a path across space towards them.

In under two minutes the two sides would be on each other

The shrill lock on tone filled his helmet as his Co-Pilot, or in reality, Combat Intelligence, worked in coordination with the CI's of the other Longswords and in under half a second organized the missiles to where there were no two missiles locked on to the same target.

"Fire! Fox Two!"

He pressed the button on the top of his flight stick, and three AGSM-8 missiles tore away from his craft at asinine speed, so fast that the salvo of missiles had to be tracked by his V3D HUD, the bluish fiery plumes of several hundred more missiles looking almost serene as they tore straight towards the Imperial single ships.

The Imperial pilots were clearly taken by surprise by the missiles streaking towards them, but they reacted just as quickly, throwing their fighters into wild spins.

The missiles cut across the now 3,000 kilometer distance in under twenty seconds, spearing into the massed formation of Imperial "eyeball" fighters that was rapidly spreading out and breaking formation.

The evasive maneuvers were not fast enough for almost forty percent of the Imperial fighters.

He watched in fascination and glee as his HUD tracked his missiles as out of his three missiles, two found their targets.

With only a second or less to spare before impactâ€|or a clean missâ€|the warheads of the missiles, having already known that their prey was approaching dead on, set their warheads to shrapnel mode to maximize the likelihood of a hit.

Instead of the normal near-contact detonation mode the warhead exploded prematurely.

In a very small, controlled high explosive reaction, the casing of the missiles tore off as two dozen tungsten ball bearings the size of basketballs were spat towards the targeted TIE Interceptors in an oversized hyper velocity shot gun blast.

Countless Imperial fighters that were not hit directly or were lucky enough to evade, had half of their craft torn off while many more were simply atomized in explosive exchanges of kinetic energy, simply turned into clouds of confetti or brief blue fireballs.

"Sweet Jesus!" Gordon breathed as her onboard CI tallied up her kills without a sound.

Explosions covered the space before the UNSC fighters as they screamed past the 500 kilometer mark.

"_They don't have Plasma Barriers! Good Lord they were helpless."_ his wingman shouted over the coms.

Indeed they didn't, a fact that he found odd considering their capitol ships.

"_Maybe it doesn't scale down?"_

Regardless he had a battle to fight. His radio was filled with shouts of glee as the fighters radar and computers tallied nearly two hundred Imperial fighters destroyed in a single strike, simply erased from existence.

The Imperial squadrons were hastily trying to re-organize, but the Longswords were not going to let them.

They had slipped into dogfighting range.

James Gordon momentarily was excited. Over half of UNSC pilots could expect to go through their combat careers and engagements without ever engaging in a close in dogfight with the enemy. It just didn't happen that often. While the times it did were clearly deadly as the Rebellion War and Insurrection had taught, a vast majority of engagements between hostile interceptors would be an almost cat and mouse game fought at long range with salvos of missiles, and that was when Interceptors were not fulfilling their primary role of shooting down hostile missiles before they got into the engagement envelope of a starship's defenses. By the time one would ever hope to get within a visual range and use their close in 50 mm Rail Cannons one side would already be floating debris.

Now however, he would finally be able to experience the chaos of a zero-gravity dogfight.

"_Full throttle! Nearing gun range, prepare for Snap maneuvers_" the overall Wing Commander called out over the coms he like every other pilot never kept his fighter on a straight course, always aiming in the general direction of the enemy and quickly altering as to not be hit.

He watched through his V3D HUD as the remaining enemy fighters closed into 200 kilometers, 150, then finally 100 as the enemy opened fire with flurries of green energy beams.

Two dozen Longswords immediately were wiped off of his screens as they were speared, their Plasma barriers pierced and the craft beneath split open.

"_Now!"_ the Commander roared.

Slayer One yanked on the stick, the Longsword responding with enthusiasm under him as the UNSC interceptors all either shot "up" or "down" relative to the Imperial fighters , which tried to bank to meet them.

As his Longsword shot up he cut his thrust and reversed it, flipping the 30 by 40 meter interceptor around 180 degrees on its central axis in under a second, slamming him with a crushing 20 Gees. If it were not for his internal dampener and G suit he would have been turned to

a bloody paste.

Time seemed to slow as the distance closed to mere miles in a split second. Beyond the highlighted and tagged icons of the enemy craft that seemed to fill his displays he could now actually see the mass of Imperial fighters now, all banking to meet them as the stars and the ball of Harvest spun outside of his cockpit.

They were far too late.

The Longswords opened fire as they sped past "above" and "below" the Imperials, catching them in a crossfire.

An Imperial fighter came into his sights, the ship still trying to flip over to meet him and return fire.

It wouldn't get the chance.

He grinned as he pulled the trigger and sent a stream of white 50mm magnetically accelerated rounds into the hapless fighter, the Longsword vibrating around him as its two firing ports near the edge of the wings discharged in electrical fire.

The Imperial fighter simply disintegrated into its basic pieces.

The process was repeated countless times as the small Imperial fighters were torn from the sky in a turkey shoot, caught in a deadly crossfire as yet another hundred were turned into flying bits of shrapnel while the Longswords reversed thrust and dive in amongst them.

Gordon had to fight the urge to scream in delight as his craft's position became that of "behind" the still turning enemy fighters, placing him behind three of them. He held down the trigger and swept his reticule over them with his maneuvering thrusters, shattering two of them as the third evaded.

As he built up speed he dove head first into the dogfight, trying to ignore the overflow of information and targeting data on his screens as his wingman took position next to him, one covering the other, as they blew through energy weapons fire and began to twist and turn in wild maneuvers to both avoid being blasted, which another dozen Longswords were unsuccessful at.

It was nearly incomprehensible chaos.

"Break! Break! Break!" Gordan yelled into the mike as he yanked the stick back to avoid a throbbing pulse of green plasma while the large yet no less agile Longsword complied, zooming up in a tight twenty Gee turn as the assailing Imperial shot under him and began to spin to follow him.

"I've Got him!" his wingman called out as an AGSM turned the assailant into an oversized fireball.

"Thanks." Gordan breathed as he too firewalled the throttle, causing the twin fusion engines to push him into his seat with gee forces, and turned back into the battle, looking for targets.

That was one thing he was going to have plenty of today.

The remaining swarm of Eyeball shaped Imperial fighters and wedge shaped Longsword Interceptors danced around each other with a mix of zero Gee maneuvers and sharp turns in a desperate attempt to kill each other as space was lit up by the burning beams of energy weapons, the ghostly contrails of missiles, the flaring comets of fusion drives and lines of magnetically accelerated slugs.

As well the brief flashes signaling the death of a defeated pilot.

A Longsword from his squadron exploded as it took a double pulse from a screaming "Eyeball's" twin energy beams, melting through its tough hull like tissue paper and finding something vital.

Imperial fighters turned into smears or shrapnel as missiles eviscerated them or slugs tore through them.

Two opposing fighters slammed into each other, vaporizing both.

Ignoring a burning Longsword that shot across his path, Gordan slipped behind the tail of another enemy craft mere mile away.

The enemy pilot noticed this and sent the alien fighter in a tight bank, which he quickly followed.

After a couple of tight split-s turns Gordan managed to stick on the tail of the teardrop and, sticking the gun sights on his HUD onto the strangely empty looking engine of the enemy Eyeball pulled the trigger again with the same satisfying results.

He had just made ace he dully thought to himself as the battle swirled around him approaching its final act, a fact that Gordon noticed as he finally allowed his laser fine focus to glance over his displays.

The UNSC Interceptors were ruthlessly finishing off the straggling survivors.

As fast as the dogfight started, it was already over.

The time elapsed was one minute and twelve seconds.

One hundred and thirty Longswords reformed their formation as Gordon found his and slid into formation.

"_All Longswords form up. Set intercept vector towards enemy warships. Activate your nukes."_

They streaked towards the Imperial ships, leaving behind the floating debris of well over five hundred TIE Interceptors.

**UNSC Everest**

"Enemy squadron returning fire. Incoming." Frost monotoned as the wounded Battlecruiser shot to the side, evading a burst of energy beams that would have been a clean hit on the armored bridge.

The other thirty one remaining ships Combat Intelligences along with the superior AI's flung the UNSC warships onto quick evasive patterns

with their emergency thrusters far faster than any human could have reacted.

However a number of weapons fire still connected, burning through battleplate, destabilizing plasma barriers and exposing sections of ships to space. And at this range it was hopeless to try and evade everything.

"Enemy squadron is firing at will, intercepting no longer possible." The AI announced as two smaller energy blasts burned yet more wounds into the already potmarked hull.

Cole nodded, glancing at the viewscreen showing the status of the Longswords as their first salvo of AGMs hit the flock of Imperial single craft with satisfying results.

"Coming in past 15,000 kilometers sir! Reactors are three minutes to meltdown at 150 percent, even sooner on the other ships!" a senior officer shouted.

"Bring them back to one-hundred, redirect 60 percent of the power going to the engines to our weapons. We are at our maximum thrust anyway and momentum can do the rest. What about our MACs?"

The Everest shook again as Cole glanced at the viewscreen, the image zoomed in on the 14 Imperial warships. Their weapons ports burned with power as they spat a stream of weapons fire from lighter weapons at them, only to occasionally be blotted out by the larger main weapon batteries whose large emerald beams cut a line in space at a much slower rate as they too sped directly towards him.

Thrawn was going to call his bluff and stay on course too.

It had become a deadly game of chicken.

Another two of his ships shattered under the assault, the Destroyer Tharis and the Frigate Siranui. Both broke open as dozens of smaller weapons fire finally batting down their plasma barriers as larger lances of energy beams cut them nearly in two.

Twenty nine markers of UNSC ships were left on the battlespace screens.

"MACs at 94 percent charge fleetwide sir!"

Cole nodded. He glanced at the main viewscreen as the targeting reticules of the fleet's collective MAC guns settled onto their own individual targets, each with their own web of targeting data.

He bit his upper lip.

"It will have to do. Fire" Preston Cole shouted.

"Aye sir!"

Preston Cole watched the weapons station as readouts of the Everest's two Heavy MACs pulse- then redline with power as the ship lurched, its magnetic coils propelling two 200 ton slugs at 7,000 kilometers per second.

Again streaks of magnetically accelerated slugs flashed across the now relatively short distance in an instant, striking their opponents like lightning strikes.

The reconstituted shields of the Imperial ships glowed a strange orange hue as they flickered while the mighty mass of Imperial warships were jolted out of their formation by the impacts.

One of the bulbous clam shaped destroyer analogs, had apparently lost its shields in the massed Archer swarm. A lighter 100 ton MAC from one of his remaining Frigates punched clear through her from stem to stern, boiling metal way and ballooning as the soft round expanded inside of the target.

One of the three huge wedge shaped capitol ships released a full salvo from its primary weapons turrets just as four MACs struck it. The shield flashed a solid silver for a moment, fully deflecting one round before it flashed out of existence, giving in to the gigaton level of kinetic energy. A wave of metal and debris exploded at the bow and shot down the length of the vessel as a slug passed through its precious innards, gutting it and turning its elevated tower section into debris. Secondary explosions and superheated atmosphere vented and tore the rest of the warship apart.

Another one of the smaller cruiser like cousins of the Imperial capitol ships went up as a trio of slugs slammed into the shields, which burned bright for an instant before they collapsed, allowing two MACs to split it open and find the reactor. The surface of the ship seemed to bubble with explosions before finally a cataclysm of fire consumed it and another nearby Imperial destroyer class vessel that had been left a tumbling ruin by a MAC and several Heavy Railgun slugs from a Heavy Cruiser ripping into its bow.

Eleven Imperial warships were left as they fired their thrusters and corrected their course, their seemingly impervious shields flickering with electricity.

And they immediately fired another full strength salvo of their own, yet another solar flare of deadly energy streaking towards the UNSC shipsâ€¦ just as the beams from the destroyed Imperial capitol ship's primary batteries, the energy weapon bolts still tracking, struck its target.

The Marathon Cruiser Leviathan.

The Heavy Cruiser, already wounded and burned like most of the remaining UNSC ships, staggered as her barely functioning forward Plasma Barrier emitter destabilized and collapsed as a trio of green plasma lances sliced into it. Ten more elongated green comets of hellfire struck its starboard side, punched through the already depleted two meter thick armor and released their fury inside, exploding metal where it touched. The bolts burned straight to its engineering compartment, shattered the fusion reactors and set off a white sun inside of the ship. The entire warship blossomed into fire and ejected trails of golden sparks and dying flickers of static electricity.

Cole watched with a muted fascination as the main salvo of Imperial bolts struck.

The deck screeched and groaned, throwing the crew and the Admiral back against the deck as more alarms wailed.

The Flagship was struck yet again, this time with a renewed vengeance as beams of plasma and energy. Everest dipped out of formation with its bow belching flame and atmosphere as three of the remaining Destroyers and Frigates spun out of formation with decks ripped open and engines damaged, firing their maneuvering thrusters to right their possibly endless tumble as bulkheads sealed to end the proverbial bleeding.

The UNSC Destroyer Agincourt, its MACs out of operation and most of the crew either dead or having abandoned ship and under AI and CI control slaved to the Everest, charged headlong into the concentrated streams of plasma and energy bolts "sacrificing itself to save her sister ships.

Still five more UNSC vessels were picked off and disappeared off of Admiral Cole's displays.

The Halcyon Class Cruiser Isis listed suddenly on its axis as a trio of beams wrecked much of its bow, setting the bow ablaze as atmosphere spewed into space while a much worse situation played out on a second of the remaining Halcyon cruisers, the Talos.

A full alpha strike from a Victory Class Cruiser destabilized the Plasma barrier and set upon the ship behind it, managing to land a lucky strike on an already open wound just below the barely functioning MAC. The beams simply burned through entire decks and feet of armor in an instant, slicing through the upper decks and instantly igniting atmosphere but also fuel and equipment and tearing all the way through to the central mass of the four million ton vessel.

One sixteenth of the cruiser's mass had instantly been vaporized.

The Talos heaved as explosive decompression ripped through it faster than bulkheads could halt, vaporizing even more of the ship as its entire length rippled. The frame buckled as the proverbial structural spine snapped as more intense explosions tore the guts out from the bowels of the UNSC warship, which began to violently break up spewing shrapnel everywhere, some even striking fellow ships.

"Hull breaches on decks seven through twenty seven! Structural integrity is threatened! Fires on decks nine and twelve. Half of our port side weapons are no longer responding! Our Plasma Barriers are just about to have it!" his XO shouted from the rear of the bridge.

"Seal that hull breach and vent atmosphere to those decks now!" Cole shouted as he stole a glance at the tactical V3D Displays.

Only 10,000 kilometers from the enemy.

And the Imperials were going to simply pound them to a pulp with their lighter weapons while their main weapons charged for one final strike, which would be at point blank range, a case driven home as the Imperials swept their pulse lasers across the fleet from side to

side, melting more armor and opening yet more wounds in the ships.

Cole turned to the Avatar of Frost, gripping the handrail as the Battlecruiser shook with more pulse laser hits.

"Time till collision?"

The AI paused for a second before answering.

"One minute and thirty seconds sir. Longswords have intercepted flanking Imperial squadrons."

The viewscreen switched to show the trailing Imperials vessels spitting green lances of fire from every weapons ports in frenzied bursts, some striking Longswords, instantly atomizing dozens before suns burst into existence around each ship.

The Interceptors had launched their Havok Nuclear missiles in a single massed strike.

The enemy ships reappeared, a destroyer analogue all but glittering debris and another of the smaller wedge shaped cruiser belching flame and debris and spinning out of control.

But the remaining eight ships hid behind still glowing silver energy shields, unscathed.

Cole slammed his hand on the viewer, just as another half dozen Interceptors were vaporized.

"Pull them out of there!" he half shouted at Frost.

"Aye sir." The AI replied unquestioning.

Cole nodded, breathing heavily as he got into his command chair, taking a glance around at the crew, several of which were now gone thanks to injuries sustained by overloading consoles or falling to the deck under impact of weapons fire.

Twenty Three UNSC ships remained on the tactical screens, barely holding a two to one advantage that was clearly needed.

It was time to play dirty.

"Launch a third of our remaining Shivas and prepare to wipe your memory. Also tell medical to be prepared for heavy casualties." He spoke to the AI.

If there are any of us left.

Frost paused as his XO turned to him with a look of worry, "Sir the EM pulse at that close of a range will dramatically affect our targeting and even short out the magnetic coils on some of the weapons systems."

Cole nodded.

"Then we will go to manual targeting if we need to. Prepare emergency course corrections on my go. Ready our secondary Mass Drivers

andâ€|. "

The senior sensors officer shouted in alarm as contacts exploded from the Imperial vessels.

"Vampire! Vampire!" Enemy torpedoes incoming!"

"Intercept!" Cole shouted, but he knew it wasn't necessary. Already Frost and the AI's on the other ships along with their CI's and even basic targeting systems had already tagged the hostile munitions for intercept and the point defense turrets and pulse laser pods on board the UNSC ships all swung into action.

Magnetic Accelerators on the 60 mm Helical Point Defense Turrets charged with electricity as the fast tracking mounts spun around in a blur to track their targets.

Dozens of pulse laser pods emplaced over the hard points on each ship surged with power as their focusing lenses located and tracked the targets.

The torpedoes, some three hundred thirty of them, glowed red against the backdrop of space. They were some sort of weapon encased in an energy field, which gave them the look of blood red shooting stars.

"Targets identified, targeting with Anti Missile Lasers." Frost announced with no emotion.

"Engaging."

Red lines of light flashed into existence, cutting hundreds of lines in the blackness of vacuum, beams of pure focused rays of energy and light cooked the frames of the streaking torpedoes

Brief fireballs and silent explosions signaled the death of the missiles and their deadly payloads as the Lasers retargeted and fired another stream of concentrated pulses.

Cole watched with concern as only half of them were destroyed by the time they entered the range of his 60mm CIWS, the last line of defense.

"Lasers are encountering shielding on the missiles, concentrated pulses necessary to defeat. Targeting CIWS." Frost replied as the Admiral and the crews held their breath as the spheres of energy drew closer by the second, more falling to the concentrated energy pulses.

Cole drew his breath, "Frost launch Shivas."

"Aye sir."

Sixty Shiva nuclear missiles tore away from the UNSC ships with the help of their magnetic launch tubes before streaking away in fiery plumes as they rocketed towards the Imperial vessels , now a scant 6,000 kilometers distant and only barely a minute away from impact as the Missiles quickly adjusted their course.

The ghostly contrails of the nuclear missiles crossed the paths of

the blazing crimson enemy torpedoes, and tore past each other.

With roughly half of the Imperial torpedoes left the Railgun CIWS activated, targeting the torpedoes at their maximum effective combat range of 1500 kilometers.

They sent a hail of accurate fire and streams of slugs at the torpedoes.

With a fourth generation smart AI the targeting, already highly accurate with dumb AI s or basic computer guidance, it was almost art...if art were to have consisted of a Magnetically accelerated 60mm tungsten dart impacting a target with enough kinetic energy alone to turn it to dust.

This time the simple yet proven tactic of destroying an opponent with simple kinetic force proved to be much more adept at the shielded torpedoes.

They went down in droves as over three hundred streams of hypervelocity slugs stitched lines in space.

Cole watched as their numbers dwindled.

One hundred and fifty.

One hundred.

Eighty.

Sixty.

Forty Five.

Thirty three.

Twenty One.

Twelve.

Eight.

The remaining torpedoes for whatever stroke of luck or the pure fact that they were fired at under ten thousand kilometers, survived, and homed in on the Valiant Class Battlecruiser.

Three more were felled by CIWS and Pulse Laser fire from _Everest_, but Cole knew that there was not going to be enough time.

"All hands brace for impact! Frost prepare to transfer command!" Admiral Cole shouted as the feeling of dread crept over the bridge, the highlighted form of one of the surviving Marathons, the lightly damaged UNSC _Reagan_, _was highlighted as its commander would be the designated commander of the remnants of the fleet if Cole and _Everest _were destroyed.

The energy torpedoes, now reduced to two, seemed to burn the fabric of space itself as one pulled ahead of the other, looking like a pair of blood red eyes looking at Cole through the viewscreens.

Cole gripped the hand railing at the command console, knowing that the flagship would not survive a hit like that.

"_We've got it sir!_" the com system crackled to life as Cole's eyes frantically read the ID.

The Frigate _Leyte Gulf,_ its hull pockmarked with breaches, fired its emergency thrusters, shooting in front of _Everest_ and with a second to spare turned its profile sideways, placing itself between the incoming torpedoes and _Everest_.

Cole watched impassively.

He had seen countless men and women sacrifice themselves, for democracy, for power, for freedom, and for religion.

But for himâ€¦he would never get used to itâ€¦or over it.

Silently he said a prayer as the torpedoes struck the destroyer.

A few dozen escape pods popped from her hull as the ship visibly shuddered under the impacts, before the unknown warheads detonated.

Violent red light consumed the ship and enveloped it, blinding out all of the forward viewscreens.

The brief star vanished as fast as it appearedâ€¦leaving nothing but burning flaming fragments of what had once been a 535 meter Frigate.

The _Everest_ and the rest of the fleet plowed through the debris.

The tone on the bridge was somber, not as much as a word was spoken.

Cole watched as his Shiva's streaked silently towards the enemy, their progress tracked on the viewscreen as their number was halved by the enemy's pulse lasers.

All those torpedoes had been meant for him.

"Distance, 4,000 kilometers and closing." Wien announced.

The Shiva's detonated as one, wholly enveloping the Imperial ships as EMP crashed into the twenty two remaining UNSC ships like a wave, and the targeting and radars were washed out with interference.

**ISD Admonitor**

"All hands brace for impact! Full power to shields, reactors to 135 percent!" Thrawn thundered as the UNSC nuclear torpedoes, some ten of them that slipped past his point defenses, detonated amongst his ships.

"Radiological alarm!" Parrik cried out before he, the Grand Admiral and the rest of the crew were thrown to the deck.

The Imperial ships were enveloped with white light and radiation as

the transparasteel windows polarized to their maximum setting.

Outside ten tiny suns flashed into existence, ballooned, and enveloped the Imperial battle group.

The collective nuclear fireballs cooled to a yellow and then dull red. Even with vacuum- enhanced loads that encased nuclear weapons that made the Soviet Cold War Era 50 megaton Tsar Bombs look like firecrackers, nuclear warheads in space did not persist a fraction as long as aerial or ground bursts.

The deck shook as the shields, their emitters flushed with energy as the hypermatter reactors poured all their energies into them, strained against the sudden heat and power of suns throwing their energies against them for several seconds, and flashed in and out of existence.

The destructive clouds thinned to translucency and a glittering haze of cooling metal formed an expanding halo around the area of space.

Inside this silver confetti, the shimmering patches resolved: the energy shields of nine surviving Imperial Warships, including the _Admonitor_, _ the Imperial class Star Destroyer _Rendillia_, three Victory Star Destroyers , the Acclamator Assault ship and two of the remaining Dreadnaught Class Heavy Cruisers, one of which was barely more than a floating hulk as fires raged across her surface and atmosphere vented from nearly all of her lateral surface.

"Shields are at ten percent sir! Emitters are at critical limits! Hull breaches and radiation damage on every ship!"

"Our sensors are covered in interference! Targeting computers are scrambled and are rebooting!" Thrawn's XO called out as Thrawn ran to the nearest console and switched it over to the sensor screens.

Indeed the display was only covered in static with a very occasional return on what might have been a UNSC ship's position.

So that's what being on the receiving end of a nuclear weapon is like

"All ships go to manual targeting!" Thrawn ordered as he turned back to the main viewscreens.

"Revert to visual tracking?" Parrik asked, a dumbfound look crossing his face.

"_We might as well be throwing rocks in a general direction."_

"Yes. Time to go back to the basics Mr. Parrik."

The crew nodded, "Aye sir."

Grand Admiral Thrawn looked out of main window—he could actually see the opponent now, rapidly approaching motes of light in the distance that looked more like blocky toys.

"If we are experiencing this disruption it is likely they are too at this range. All ships fire at discretion and prepare for close combat." Thrawn ordered as he maintained his cool composure before continuing.

"Prepare to fire maneuvering thrusters and go evasive on my orders."

The helmsman at the fore of the bridge nodded in agreement.

"I'm guessing 3,000 kilometers now sir. Firing commands?" Parrik asked, moving to stand beside him.

"Everything and the kitchen sink."

Thrawn was now so completely focused on what was happening that he could have been hit with a blaster bolt and would hardly have noticed.

UNSC Everest****

"Sensors coming back online! Closing in to 5,000 kilometers sir!"

Cole grit his teeth as a wall of enemy weapons fire aimed at the general area of his ships burst forth, some still striking ships, taking one more of his now six remaining destroyers out with a direct hit to the bridge.

The bridge of the **_Everest_** was a din of combat information and shouted statistics, all of which seemed to point to the fact that it was becoming increasingly unlikely that the flagship at least would survive this conflict as anything more than smoldering fragments. Green fire was washing over the UNSC ships with increasing and frightening regularity, even if half of the fire missed.

"ETA to target twenty seconds! MACs still recycling!"

"Evacuate all crew to the central sections of the ship and away from the outer hull! All crew is to put on respirators and oxygen tanks!" Cole ordered as Frost and the crew complied.

Cole gripped the armrests of his command chair until his knuckles turned white, watching as the Imperial ships loomed closer in the foreground. The two massive capitol ships and their three smaller cousins dominated the viewscreens, their broad, arrowhead-like shape spitting dozens of energy bolts at the onrushing opponents.

The next thirty seconds would be the most hellish and the most agonizingly long of Admiral Preston Cole's life—so far.

"Recommend evasive action!" his helmsman shouted.

"Stay the fleet on course, fire Mass Drivers." Cole said, keeping his voice from calm as on the inside he wanted to cry for evasive maneuvers.

The secondary batteries of the UNSC ships, having been neglected for the duration of the battle for their much lower striking power, spun on their mounts and fired, dozens of 500 pound slugs streaking at

4000 kilometers a second like spears of white fire. A full forth of them missed completely due to the lack of accurate targeting that was still present, but those that did hit rippled the shields with two hundred kilotons of kinetic energy.

Shields lit as they tried to absorb the massive energy.

One of the Imperial destroyer type ships that had lost its shields shattered and rolled through space as five 500 pound slugs of soft metals tore through it and dented its armor.

The other ships shield flared a brilliant blue as rounds bounced off of their shields, the Imperial vessels firing another flurry of bolts that were more accurate than the first. The cruiser _Chamberlin _was cored as fire ripped the length boiling armor off the starboard side leaving it a flaming ruin as one of its engines sputtered and air escaped breached decks with bodies tumbling out into the void.

"Fifteen seconds to impact!" Frost called aloud, the central Imperial capitol ship looming ahead larger.

I know that is you Thrawn.

"MACs at 50 percent! Plasma Barrier destabilizing!" Wien responded as a trio of lighter impacts flared across the surface of the flagship's defensive barrier.

Another officer, not to be outdone. "Reactor meltdown imminent! Ninety seconds!"

"Hold course, focus fire on the second capitol" he said quietly.

"Sir?"

"Hold course!" he bellowed.

"Frost, prepare a Shiva. Launch Shiva's course for mark one eight zero. Full burn for twelve seconds and detonate."

"Aye, sir," the AI replied as code ran down its avatar.

"Missile ready, sir."

"Sir!", the senior weapons officer swiveled around from his console.. His lips were drawn into a tight thin line. "That course fires the missile directly away from our enemies."

"I am aware of that, Lieutenant."

"Shiva away, sir! On course"one eight zero, maximum burn." Frost announced, cutting the man off.

Cole nodded, "Transfer emergency thruster controls to my station."

And in a whisper so low that while it was picked up by the bridge log microphone, no one else could have possibly heard, Cole muttered, "_Fix bayonets._"

"Ten seconds to impact!"

"All hands, brace for impact!" Cole called, buckling himself into the command chair as even more klaxons blared throughout the ship.

"Yes, sir!"

The Imperial ships all finally moved to evade, their engines fired in an attempt to evade, but the central capitol ship that the Everest was streaking towards would be too late to get out of the way. Its turbolasers fired one last desperate volley, raking the Everest from stem to stern with their fury as explosions rippled the length of the ship and nearly threw Cole out of his chair were it not for the webbing.

The UNSC ships thundered into the heart of the Imperial fleet.

The already damaged Frigate Excellence, its crew having abandoned ship and under slaved AI control, plowed headlong into the smaller arrowhead like Imperial carrier vessel cowering at the rear of the Imperial line. The ships immediately fused together in a tremendous amount of heat and force, superstructures of the two craft locked together for a split second—and both ships opened fire at point-blank range unnecessarily just before they were obliterated in a cloud of debris and atomic fire.

Archer missiles with limited targeting, Mass drivers and Imperial Energy lances filled the space between the two forces. Explosions, streaks of metal and dazzling beams of radiation and plasma that burned in Cole's retinas.

A UNSC destroyer was sliced in two as the wounded cruiser Chamberlin was holed through so many times that its frame was simply vaporized.

At the same time an Imperial cruiser spun sideways before its frame gave in and bent. Her shields stuttered once, trying to reestablish a protective screen just before hundred a Archer missiles and Mass Drivers struck, cratered the hull, blossomed into fire and sparks and smoldering metal as the Marathon Cruiser Muspellhiem flashed past firing more Mass Driver and Heavy railgun slugs into it.

The second remaining enemy destroyer analogue was cracked open by Archer missiles as his second to last remaining Paris Class Heavy Frigate was eviscerated by a broadside of energy bolts from the leading Imperial Capitol ship .

Cole however ignored all this, focusing on the central enemy capitol ship.

"Fire MAC!" He roared.

"Sir the remaining MAC is only 50 percent—" Frost tried to interrupt.

"FIRE!"

Without a response from the AI the only remaining MAC on the Everest, the Number Two gun, fired.

The meteoric round flung out of the barrel at 3500 kilometers per second, and slammed into the glimmering shield of the Imperial wedge shaped vessel with a much reduced force of 292 megatons.

It still was enough.

Just before the Battlecruiser had fired, the Imperial warship had fired its emergency thrusters to fling itself out of the way and to give it a clear broadside as the _Everest_ passed.

Now it was jarred as the 200 ton slug struck it on its port side, cutting its momentum in that direction and turning the shields solid white as the titanic forces interacted with each otherâ€|.before the shield collapsed with an electrical spark and a 100 meter gash appeared on its dorsal flank spewing debris.

The _Everest_ closed the distance screeched and shuddered as she grazed the prow of the Imperial battleship.

"Course correction now!" Cole shouted as he slammed down the button on his commander's seat. A bang resonated through the ship's hullâ€"one lieutenant flew sideways as the inertial dampeners and gravity plating fluctuated and impacted with the bulkhead with a sickening wet crunch as her arm snapped.

The Battlecruiser flew to the side, as explosive decompression, likely intentional, shot out of the starboard side of the Imperial battleship to push it further out of the way.

For a split second, the _Everest_ and the Imperial capitol ship, were in a position that, for the UNSC, was something that had not taken place since the end of sea warfare in the age of sail.

They were separated by a mere hundred meters, and both were now un-protected by energy shields or plasma barriers.

In one hellish second, the space in between the two turned from the blackness of space into a cataclysm of fire, chaos, explosions and light, as they fired their broadside weapons point blank into each other.

Mass drivers punched through armor, deforming hull and punching through decks.

Pounding pulses of energy weapons fire, laser batteries and plasma melted through armor, battleplate and ship.

Streams of rail-cannon fire from the remaining CIWS tore through un-armored weapons mounts and docking ports.

Archer Missiles, simply dumb fired, blew whole chunks of ship apart.

And three green blinding beams of pure green light and energy burned through dozens of decks and one exited out of the other side of the UNSC flagship.

Admiral Cole's crash webbing gave out, flinging him to the nearest bulkhead as consoles overloaded and the ship groaned like a person

being stabbed, warning lights indicating critical damage and hull breaches to nearly every deck.

The last thing that Admiral Preston Cole saw before his head slammed into the console closest to him was the side of the Imperial Battleship exploding outward with secondary explosions as fires leapt from the stricken bridge of the Imperial capitol ship, its engines flickering off as it began a slow tumble away from its four surviving fellow ships, debris and bodies tumbling away from it.

A sudden sun appeared, placed perfectly amongst the four surviving enemy ships, now separate from the flagships and spinning on their axis to bring their weapons to bare, consuming them in nuclear fire as Cole's Shiva detonated, enveloping them as the fifteen surviving UNSC ships spun around on their own axis prepared to fire another salvo.

Just as Admiral Cole's head slammed into the console, sending his world into darkness with a wet thud.

The _Everest_ spun through space, lifeless and trailing debrisâ€|

9. Chapter 7

****Thank you everyone for the amazing support and response to this story.****

Harvest****

Utgard****

Sergeant Avery Johnson ran.

Motes of energy bolts slammed into the water around him, turning it to instant steam as he, Bryne, Lee and PFC Jenkins sprinted through the darkened maze of tunnels that made up the vast drainage system of the now ruined city of Utgard, many parts of which were now exposed to the devastated city above.

They sloshed through ankle-deep muck, Avery thankful to be in full combat power armor that filtered out the rank smell.

The hardened Marine didn't like the cramped quarters. Their mobility was restricted by the narrow pipes; worse, they were bunched up and therefore easier to kill with grenades or massed fire, fire that would be bound to pick up soon.

Motion sensors picked up hundreds of targets.

The constant downpour from storm drains above made the longer ranged radar next to useless.

They followed Bryne's electronic map on their HUDs through the maze of pipes. Light filtered in from aboveâ€"beams of illumination connected to the manhole-cover vent holes.

Every so often something moved and blocked that light.

They had to make it to most central point of the city that they could, as to make the small B-88 football nuke still strapped on to Bryne's Power Armor effective.

And that central location, identified as the Utgard Mall, was now only a mere half mile away from them.

But the Imperials were not going to let them get there.

As soon as he, Bryne, Jenkins and the fellow Marine Matthias Lee had penetrated the permeable energy dome the Imperials had had fell upon them in droves, keeping them on the run for five straight hours filled with harrowing firefights in the underground complexes of trashed office towers.

His Suit's HUD went awash with static for the third time as Avery slammed his armored hand against the side of his helmet, attempting to get the earpiece equipment within to function properly after a harrowing near hit by Imperial energy weapons fire scorched the outer layer of titanium A on his helmet and sent the fragile electronics within haywire.

And most annoyingly the software hack that Avery had emplaced within his power suit's hardware originally only meant to be used during downtime was now filling his helmet with music from a playlist that he had uploaded and was playing an ancient Earth rock song through his helmet's speaker.

"_Generals gathered in their masses!"_

Bryne turned as let out a shrill warning of more incoming enemy soldiers, all Avery could do was ignore the classical anti war song and keep running, and fighting.

"_Just like witches at black massesâ€¦!"_

The Marines rounded a corner of the sewage system that his sensors said led to a larger drainage and maintenance shaft.

Lee shouted a yelp of surprise.

"Contact!"

Within a second two explosions roared and shook the ground underfoot, knocking Avery slightly off balance.

The young Marine snarled and as his MA6 began cracking out controlled single shots, and then Bryne's SAW snarled, the 10mm caseless supersonic ceramic slugs drowning out any noise that wasn't already filtered out by his helmet.

And the whole confined world of a ten meter diameter sewage tunnel exploded in gunfire and grenade explosions.

"_Sorcerers of death's construction!"_

Avery swore and swung his MA6 around the mouth of the small cavern as his malfunctioning HUD struggled to keep the lowlight amplification VISR settings and identify targets.

He fired in controlled, short bursts from his Combat rifle towards where he saw glints of white plastoid armor off the low level reflective lighting, which was intermittently lit up by crimson light of their own weapon discharges.

The last grenade from Jenkin's MA6's Grenade Launcher left the underbarrel launcher and detonated in the middle of the Imperial's some ten feet below and ten yards away.

A simple unguided Fuel to Air Explosive Incendiary Grenade.

"_In the fields the bodies burning._"

Fire consumed the armored Imperials, lighting the cavern up like a flare as five enemy soldiers danced and withered under the intense flames as the substance stuck to their armor and burned their way through the thinner bodysuits and through the skin beneath.

Their screams were luckily drowned out by the roar of weapons fire.

Yet more Enemy Soldiers stormed in from adjacent tunnels and began to add their fire into the fray.

Energy bolts hummed past, exploding rocks and concrete and turning water into sprays of ozone as they zeroed in on Avery's small position and laid down suppressing fire.

More bricks exploded and turned into fragments as Avery gave up on short bursts and flicked the selector to full auto, grimacing as he remembered he only had one full ammo strip left after this.

Avery emptied the 60 round ammunition strip as the MA6's tri-barrels snarled and burned red hot, drawing a proverbial line from one Stormtrooper to the next as he went from left to right. The gun's recoil dampeners struggled to keep the weapon on target as hypersonic 8mm copper wrapped tungsten slugs cut through a trio of enemies at 1800 meters per second, splitting them in half or turning them to bloody ribbons.

"_As the war machine keeps turning_."

Lee grunted and gurgled as his throat exploded, painting Avery's visor with a splash of hot gore as a bolt of red plasma struck the more lightly armored and vulnerable neckpiece of the Marine's power Armor not covered in the stronger titanium A and depleted uranium plates, burning through carbon nano tubes in an instant.

His armored body dropped from its firing position, and rolled over the lip of the shaft and into the firestorm below.

His vitals flatlined on the screens of Avery, Bryne's and Jenkin's HUDs.

The three Marines didn't have time to acknowledge the loss.

Bryne held down the trigger on his SAW, emptying the one hundred round drum of 10mm slugs, turning concrete into powder and punching through armor and men alike, while those that didn't penetrate the white Imperial armor dented and deformed, sending two Imperials

spinning to the ground with shattered bones and internal bleeding to be finished off later.

The fight raged on.

"_Oh lord yeah!_"

The MA6 clicked dry. Avery didn't bother trying to reload as he dropped the weapon and pulled the captured "blaster" strapped to his armored hip.

Having test fired captured weapons for weeks he immediately knew how to use it, even if there was no integrated targeting with his armor's HUD and he had to sight it manually.

He squeezed the trigger as a the unfamiliar flash of energy bolts leapt from it, striking one Imperial in the chest, once, twice, and then three times as the enemy soldier's limp body crumpled to the wet ground with smoke pouring from its chest.

The music in his helmet threatened to go off again as Avery angrily slammed the side of his helmet, this time thankfully shutting it off as the last of the contacts were gunned down with brutal efficiency.

Incoming fire petered out.

"Clear!" Bryne called out as Jenkins cursed.

"Lee is down sir."

Bryne nearly grunted as he dropped his SAW, his last ammo drum spent, and leapt to the small cavern below, retrieving Lee's fallen MA6 and checking it.

The young man and Avery both followed, their heavily armored forms landing in the shallow water with wet splashes as they checked their ammo, Avery taking one final look at the deceased Marine's limp armored form.

"I've got two Ammo strips left." Jenkins called out.

Avery nodded, "I've only got one full strip left sir. And my enemy weapon."

Bryne merely turned to Avery and wordlessly tossed him a single spare ammo strip before speaking.

"Im at two as well, plus three shots for my ARC Railgun and a frag, along with a three dozen kiloton nuke on my back."

Avery bent down to scoop up a fallen Imperial weapon to toss to Jenkins, before the fallen white form of the downed Imperial next to it began to move around, wounded and dazed by a hit that failed to penetrate its armor, likely from Bryne's antiquated yet still potent SAW used mainly by the Colonial Guard.

Without a second's hesitation Avery hiked his right leg up, transferred power from his power pack to the strength amplifying nano-suit that covered his body under his armor-plates, and brought

down his leg on top of the Imperial's back.

A wet sick crunch, a gurgled scream and cloud of blood that mixed with the surrounding water resonated in the small cavern as Avery pulled his boot out of the man.

Bryne made no comment as Jenkins simply turned his gaze away and focused on checking his weapon.

"We have got to move. Only another five hundred meters to go." Bryne replied calmly with no hint of emotion.

"This is a one way mission isn't it Sarge." Jenkins suddenly asked.

Avery paused as he closed his eyes and took in a deep breath, thankful that his armor filtered in the air.

"_Damn son, you would haveâ€¦hell, you already are, a fine Marine."_

Avery took a look a Bryne.

"Is there anyway we can get that thing to be remotely detonated?"

Bryne didn't even pause as he place a fresh ammo strip in his MA6.

"No. Our remote detonating system will not penetrate the shield dome if we escape it. We have no option." He answered with little emotion.

Jenkins audibly gulped.

"Yâ€¦Yes sir."

**Utgard**

**Imperial Command Center**

**Base of former Tierra Space Elevator**

"Are we tracking them?" the woman asked, ignoring the commotion around her as dozens of men and droids worked around her.

"Yes ma'am, they just got through Omega Squads, they have taken out a platoon so far." The officer sitting at the console replied as his hands danced on the keyboards, panning the holographic displays to show the last location of the enemy infiltrators who were now crawling through the sewage system of the captured city like rats.

Very deadly rats.

Field Marshall Ivani Lak pursed her lips.

She watched footage taken from the helmet cam of a Stormtrooper who had been in pursuit of these UNSC "Marines", as a hectic firefight dominated the screen.

The trooper spun out of cover with the targeting reticule of his E-11 snapped onto the armored form of a UNSC soldier only 20 yards away on a city street outside of the shield dome, a firefight that had happened hours ago.

The blaster flashed once, striking the power suited enemy squarely in the chest. The enemy soldier stumbled back under the force of the blow, nearly falling down but remaining upright.

The stormtrooper moved to fire again before the screen suddenly jerked and sharp roaring cracks could be heard.

A spray of blood went in the air as the stormtrooper collapsed the ground, shot by one of the Marine's fellow soldiers as the camera kept rolling.

The stricken enemy soldier got back into position, moving up towards the screen with nothing more than a blackened and burnt chest plate, the large tri-barreled combat rifle searching for targets as the recording stopped.

Advanced projectile weapons and power armor indeed.

"They are heading to the central part of the dome." Ivani announced as the lieutenants and officers next to her, all men, nodded in agreement.

"But what for?" asked her second in command Matien Kal asked as he paced to and fro and the other end of the large command table, placed in the center of the room that had once been the control center for the skyhook that had once pierced the sky, reduced now to nothing more than the towering base that still stretched two miles into the sky.

When Ivani had taken command under the orders of Thrawn she had to face the usual behaviors and actions of fellow male dominated commanders, most of them choosing to not trust her or believe in her capability to command.

However she quickly dispelled those as fast as she always did, with her blunt, sharp and no-nonsense persona and actions that refused to have anything but her way be an option.

A native from Cardia, Ivani had grown up in the proud military planet not far from the citadel that served as the Grand Army of the Republic's main training center for non-clone personnel during the Clone Wars before reverting to Imperial control.

Getting into the Academy had proven to be a herculean challenge, and dealing with the unavoidable sexism had been another, but graduating at the top of her class had been all she had needed to be granted the rank of field marshall, with the hope of one day becoming a Sector General.

However most of her time before secretly being attached to Thrawn's "expedition" into the unknown regions had been spent mainly dealing with the occasional riot and Rebel backed terrorist attacks, but her brief career still had seen her become one of the few commanders engage in battle with Rebellion forces, as she had on the planet Fion

and emerge victorious.

Now however, she found herself holed up in the underground complex that had made up a captured city of an unknown Human Empire that as of now had sent in a full fledged fleet to do battle with Thrawns forces, cutting her off from orbital support.

As she reviewed the battle progressing upstairs she frowned.

Things were now getting nasty upstairs, and she had lost contact with the _Admonitor_ and it was looking increasingly like she was witnessing the first true defeat of an Imperial Navy Fleet.

Who are these people?

Ivani would have scoffed had she faced opponents with slug throwers before her assignment here.

Not anymore. Watching hypersonic slugs fired from projectile weapons that defied all previous notions of the type of weapons cut through Stormtrooper armor with ease changed one's mind quickly, as did starship mounted coil guns that struck Star Destroyers at low C-fractional speeds with the force of a full heavy turbo laser alpha strike.

Reading the initial reports of the opponents in this sector before arriving here still didn't do these enemies justice, and if the fleet was about to be booted out of the system she would have to be ready to be on her own.

If that were the case she was at least equipped to hold out and defend against an enemy Base Delta Zero against her, no thanks to her incredibly powerful defensive shield dome that encompassed most of the city along with her base.

The city was now a proverbial fortress that held fifty thousand Imperial soldiers and Stormtroopers, hundreds of AT-STs, Hover Tanks, Fighter Tanks, TIE Fighters, SPM-TAs and over a dozen AT-ATs.

And this was even further protected by an array of ten surface to orbit capitol grade heavy turbo laser batteries that could fire on targets even with the shield dome up, thanks to the capability to drop the tiny section needed for an energy bolt to pass through.

No she was in a fortress, one that she doubted could be crackedâ€¦easily.

Looking at the progress of the enemy soldiers she cracked a grin.

They were heading directly towards the location of her hidden card that she had up her sleeve.

Should the UNSC attack against her position prevail, she had taken the liberty of rounding up any of the remaining populace from even the most remote surviving areas of the planet to escape bombardment or those whom had been left behind from the evacuation.

In sum she was using nearly ten thousand civilians as a proverbial shield.

However she herself was mindful of the orders from Grand Admiral Thrawn, that any unnecessary Civilian casualties would not be tolerated, something that was a novel concept to most commanders she had worked with in the past.

"Have a platoon cut them off, and let the trailing ones keep their distance so we can push them into the trap and capture them." She ordered

Kal nodded and moved to carry out her commands as she panned the viewer out to show a view of the area surrounding the city.

She was planning on the UNSC attempting to bombard her position, but she had a feeling just from observations of the civilians they would be unwilling to try punching through her defense shield and kill their own in the process.

Thus she could force them to try and land and engage directly in battle, limiting them to airstrikes and a ground campaign, something that with the help of her turbo laser batteries denying heavy direct air support from starships could expand her perimeter and allow her to not be forced to hide under her shield while using her fighter tanks in conjunction with AT-AAs to set up a perimeter of nearly fifty miles surrounding the city under an aerial umbrella.

She highlighted several key points surrounding the city.

They needed to be held.

She had no doubt that should her forces be somehow pushed back through conventional means that the UNSC could set up artillery in these locations to simply bombard her position and force her into a siege, something that she knew she would lose.

These key points around the outside of the city included places identified as the Vigron Highlands, the leveled remains of a military installation called the "Newton" Armory, the city's large spaceport outside the city, the tattered remnants of a highway system that lead directly into the city, and a wide plain to the west that was now a half glassed ruin.

The spaceport in particular was a choke point due to its location almost immediately outside the city shield dome that would allow the UNSC to simply attack from one of the half dozen supply tunnels that ran under ground into the city.

If the enemy got those locations they could effectively seal her in and lay siege to her and starve her out.

She was not about to let that happen, especially as with her for at least the time being there would be no reinforcements for either side, allowing for the possibility of simply doing enough damage to the enemy to force them to withdraw.

Ivani bit her lip as the viewer streamed footage of four of the remaining Imperial warships from Admiral Thrawn's central battle squadron be enveloped in an actual _nuclear_ sun.

They emerged battered and burnt, with shielding on one visibly giving

out as the remaining UNSC ships that had made a brazen frontal attack spun on their central axis and fired on them with salvos of torpedoes and magnetically accelerated slugs that tore into them.

One officer visibly cursed as a star destroyer went up, shredded by weapons fire as the others were finished off with high yield missiles or knocked out of action.

There were only Eight friendly ships left, now outnumbered as the enemy ships moved to slingshot themselves around the planet to engage them again.

Destroyed remains of enemy and imperial ships now littered the gravity well of the planet, and Ivani still was having trouble getting over the image of Imperial Star Destroyers simply reduced to shattered fragments.

Ivani turned to her officers.

"Get ready for combat. We will be meeting them in battle soon."

Solomnly they all nodded, turning around to carry on with their tasks.

"And I want those infiltrators surrounded and captured if we can. Cut them off and lead them in. They could prove useful."

**ISD Admonitor**

Thrawn groan as his eyes fluttered open.

The first few seconds of the outside world blinded him before his eyes adjusted, and the rest of his senses began to return.

The wails of the klaxons were absent, and then Grand Admiral Thrawn realized that he was facing the ceiling and that he was no longer on the deck.

The throbbing pain in his left arm shot up his side and through his nerves as Thrawn suppressed the sudden pain and grinded his teeth.

He vaguely noted that his left forearm was twisted at a highly unnatural angle.

With the gravity plating having given out Thrawn reverted to his nearly forgotten zero gravity training, and without flailing his one good arm managed to spin himself over and grab hold of the ceiling.

The bridge was a mess.

Bodies of officers with necks bent at unnatural angles floated past as more dead or unconscious were simply unmoving at their stations, still strapped in to their crash webbing.

Most of the systems were clearly dead as Thrawn glanced out the bridge view screen.

The _Admonitor_ was dead in space, now floating under her own momentum as debris floated past.

From his vantage point Thrawn made out dozens of gashes in the hull with yet more simply torn off.

The entire frame of the Star Destroyer visibly buckled and was twisted, with whole sections visibly blown off.

Thrawn recalled the last moments that he remembered before the world went black.

Cole's flagship flashing past his ship, every weapons port firing as the two ships exchanged to full broadsides at point blank range in an instant.

I've been bested.

Thrawn let loose a sly grin.

Finally, a worthy adversary.

However Thrawn cast those thoughts aside as he took in the situation, before noticing that at the back of the bridge, Parrik was holding himself down on a handrail, looking at him with two stormtroopers by his side, both of the white armored troopers standing, having activated their magnetic boots in order to stand in the lack of gravity.

Parrik's mouth was moving, but now sounds were coming out.

Thrawn shook his head and focused, soon audible noises coming back as his hearing decided to turn on.

Now the klaxons and warning sirens were wailing.

And Parrik's shouts were as clear as ever.

That's the first time I've been shell shocked while on my shipâ€¦|.well there is a first.

"Sir! Admiral!"

Thrawn shook his head again, and opened his mouth.

"Do please calm down Voss, I'll be right down. I was enjoying the view."

Parrik's face contorted in a bemused look as the Chiss Grand Admiral placed his boots on the ceiling, brushing aside his now ruined uniform, and "jumped", if that were the correct word, towards the group, which to his orientation was above and upside down.

Thrawn sailed across the distance and rather awkwardly flipped his weight over and spun himself so that his feet were towards the deck as the Stormtroopers caught the Admiral like an oversized Grav Ball.

"Nap time is overâ€¦|.sir." Parrik chuckled as Thrawn huffed, thanking the Trooper as he was guided towards the rear grav lift.

"What is the sitrep?" he asked as the doors closed and the lift began to travel down, gravity abruptly returning as Thrawn got to his feet.

"The ship is a write off sir. Nearly fifty percent of the crew is dead or spaced, we have hull breaches on nearly every deck and half of the bridge tower was sheered off by a mass driver round, luckily missed the bridge."

Thrawn grimaced.

So many of his crew gone, with many of their family's unable to see them again, much less know what truly happened to them.

"And the fleet?"

Parrik gave him a look before shaking his head.

"Our flanking squadrons are more or less active but they are in a bad way, and our central squadron is simply gone sir. We have eight ships left to the enemy's fifteen." Parrik paused before continueing.

"The enemy fleet his slingshooting around the planet, and will be in engagement range in five minutes for whats left of the fleet. We are getting you off of this ship and into the three remaining Lambda class shuttles along with are remaining crew."

Thrawn nodded.

"And the UNSC Flagship?"

"Best we know no better off than us, its spinning away and has gone nearly dark, and the gravity well of the planet is threatening to pull them in."

Parrik paused as the doors of the lift opened up to the clearly trashed hangar bay, with debris and craft simply lying around as techs and droids raced to secure and ready the few remaining undamaged craft, including the shuttles.

"Orders sir?"

Thrawn paused, heaving in a deep breath before answering.

"Abandon ship and scuttle her. We have lost this one Mr. Parrik. We are out numbered and in an untenable position. Any further action will result in unnecessary casualtiesâ€¦."

"We are leaving this system. We have lost."

The Stormtroopers visibly turned to look at each other.

"Cole won this one. But we will return."

**Everest**

The sounds were muffled.

To Preston Cole it was like he was waking up from a dreamâ€¦.except

this one was all too real.

He felt people beside him, and the darkness gave way to light as Admiral Cole opened his eyes.

He was on the bridge of the _Everest _still, surrounded by officers and a medic as he blinked to focus.

Well you're not dead yet I'm afraid.

"Sir!" one of the officers, a man who was a rank of Lieutenant, shouted as Cole began to focus on him.

He was one of the newer additions to his crew, the helmsmanâ€|Lieutenantâ€|

Jacob Keyesâ€|.it was.

And that was when Cole noticed the pain.

The side of his head exploded in pain and Cole barred his teeth, coughing as the copper taste of blood filled his mouth.

"Sir you need to remain still!" the medic half shouted as he fumbled with a variety of medical instruments and was scanning him.

And that was when Admiral Cole noticed itâ€|..

A brief look of pure terror crossed his face as his eyes widened for a half second, a feeling that no human could have possibly suppressed.

He was commanding his legs to moveâ€|.

They were not responding.

He had no feeling in his legs at all.

Realization swept over him as Lieutenant Keyes bent down over him, holding him in place as for the Admiral to not bring any harm to himself.

"Sir its alright, you have broken your back but the medics all say we can have you walking again tomorrow with a cloned and rebuilt lower back. You hit the navigation console pretty hard."

Cole nodded, relishing the relief as his spinal implants sent another gush of painkillers into his bloodstream, deadening the fire that seemed to burn under his skin on both legs as nerve endings fired off.

"Just get me into my command chair for now Lieutenant. You can relieve me after this battle is over."

The Lieutenant's eyes locked with his, the man's intelligent sharp blue eyes giving away to understanding as his jet black hair reminded Preston Jeremiah Cole of him as a Lieutenant fresh out of the Luna Academy.

Keyes ignored the protests of the medics as he scooped up the six

foot two Admiral in his arms as Cole, ignoring a stab of pain, leaned forward and held on to Keyes's back as the man stood up, holding the Admiral like a groom with his bride walking into the honey moon suite as he stood up, grunting for a moment as he carried Cole to his empty Command chair, and gently set him down.

The avatar of Frost flashed into existence next to him.

"Sir I am highly opposed to this. You need to be in medical now or you will do more permanent damage to yourâ€¦|."

Cole cut the AI off.

"Medicine will have me walking again within the week Frost. What is our status? And who is in charge?"

Keyes looked around for a moment awkwardly before standing ramrod straight.

"Senior Officer Wien was incapacitated. She is currently in Medical but her injuries are non life threatening. As of ten minutes ago Lieutenant Jacob Keyes, service number 01928-19912-JK, has been the senior officer in command of the _Everest_ along side me."

Cole processed the information with a nod towards Keyes.

"Current Status?"

The man nodded curtly, "Sir! _Everest_ has substained significant damage to her hull, frame and critical systems. After engaging with Imperial flagship, hull breaches were sustained in nearly every block on our port side, and casualties are nearing the forty percent mark with our crew.."

Cole inwardly winced and closed his eyes.

That was nearly a thousand letters he would have to write back to familiesâ€¦|and a thousand more lives lost to burden.

Keyes paused at this.

"Sir your orders to evacuate to the central portions of the ship and to don breathing gear saved hundreds more."

Cole nodded, motioning him to continue.

"_Everest_ was without power and was forced to activate secondary back-up fission reactors. As of my assuming command, _Everest_ was in jeopardy of uncontrolled decent into Harvest's gravity well and atmosphere. I ordered the use of remaining emergency chemical thrusters on starboard side, which would not have been sufficient to break back into orbit. Thus I ordered the use of emergency explosive decompression of sealed decks and docking bays on our starboard side in addition to our emergency thrusters, which allowed _Everest_ to break back into a stable orbit of Harvest."

Cole nodded, impressed with the quick thinking of the man as Frost cut in, just as several crew shouted yet more reports of the terrible situation transpiring on the once proud warship.

"Our Reactors are inoperable for now and all of our primary weapons systems are down or cold. The ship has sustained so much damage that it is no longer slipspace worthy sir."

"So we are a floating duck. Status on the enemy and the fleet?"

One of the few functioning displays came to life, showing the representation of the remaining ships in his fleet flinging themselves around Harvest in a tight slingshot orbit, led by the lightly damaged Marathon Heavy Cruiser _Ronald Reagan_ with the Destroyer _Zulu Dawn_ and Halcyon Cruiser _Caligula_ flanking it on either side.

The view switched to show the remaining Imperial vessels.

All Eight of them holding position some 73,000 kilometers away from Harvest in between its moon and the planet.

Before Cole could ask a window at the bottom of the viewscreen flashed into existence, showing the fleet just after they flashed by the central Imperial force while the _Everest_ and the Imperial Flagship spun away from each other, both trailing debris and engines flashing out of existence.

The Shiva that Cole had reverse fired detonated amongst the four surviving Imperial ships from the central battlegroup that the fleet had charged into. Enveloping them as the UNSC ships fired their maneuvering thrusters, spinning around on their axis and firing every weapon they had available into what ship's emerged.

The three Imperial vessels that had just barely survived the nuclear inferno were gutted as Archers, Mass Driver slugs and a lone MAC round passed through the remaining enemy Battleship, obliterating it as the two others were blown apart.

The enemy flagship, just like his own, was dormant as it spun without power away from the battlezone.

"Status on the fleet?!" Cole shouted before wincing in pain.

His spinal inserts would run out of painkillers soon.

"Commander Andrew Del Rio of the _Reagan_ has all ships preparing a full alpha strike, or as best they can muster at this point." Frost replied as a countdown timer emerged on the screen, indicating when the remaining 14 UNSC ships would emerge from their orbit and attain weapons range.

"What of our Prowlers?"

"_Wink of an Eye_ has managed to pass through the main battlespace, and had deployed Twenty Fury Stealthed Nuclear Mines which as of twenty minutes ago are tracking."

Cole frowned.

"Best guess as to where they are?"

The screen morphed, showing the icons of the enemy ships as three blue dots neared them at an agonizingly slow pace.

"Three mines are within 800 miles of the Imperial ships and are moving to close the range. However they might not get there in time for the attack."

Cole nodded as he vainly tried to move his legs again, hoping that they would somehow magically work without having to have a new lower spine grown and attached with nanites to repair the damage.

"The other Prowlers _Night Stalker_ and _Silentium_ have inserted themselves into a low orbit of Harvest and have completed recon and scans of what is left of Harvest."

"Send me what they have after we deal with the enemy fleet." Cole responded, waving the floating image away for the time being.

We will deal with liberating the planet laterâ€¦if there is anything left to liberate.

Cole ignored another rush of pain as his mind raced through a series of calculations.

With the shape the fleet was in they could possibly beat back these remaining ships, but there would be nothing left of themâ€¦.and that was the best case scenario.

MAC coils on the remaining ships were at their breaking point and their ammunition stocks on their Archer Missiles were at twenty percent.

He would need to buy them time to get off another salvo at the Imperials, or let their faster firing weapons simply pound the UNSC ships into oblivion.

He ran more calculations through his head and on his data pad for a moment before turning to Frost.

"Send these firing solutions to Del Rio, and Get me command of those mines."

Frost paused for a moment, running over the calculations before his form flashed.

"Affirmative sir. Low level tachyon and laser links established with the Prowler _Wink of an Eye_. Commander Branson has affirmed control over the weapons to you via laser link and our STARS micro satellites acting as mirrors for the signals through his ship." Frost replied after five seconds.

"And Del Rio?" Cole asked.

Personally he had his reservations about the Commander on board the UNSC _Ronald Reagan_. He was a competent Commander that was for sure, but he did not inspire much confidence in his men, not to mention he was _strictly_ by the book and didn't strike him as imaginative. However the man, at only Thirty years old, had already served in the tail end of the Rebellion War as a helmsmen and had steadily risen through the ranks, and was thus selected as Cole's secondary commander of the fleet should he be incapacitated.

"Yes sir. Rio sends his regards to you and your crew. He seemed a bit concerned by the orders and the targeting solutions and made his reservations known to me but he is complying."

Lieutenant Keyes who chimed in, the man working away furiously at a nearby console and ordering another officer to maintain the current output secondary fission reactors.

"Sir. Forgive me, but those mines will not be in position to cause any damage to the enemy ships."

Cole nodded, taking a look at the bridge before turning to Keyes.

"I know. But I am not going to kill them with those minesâ€¦Im going to blind them."

The Lieutenant nodded in realization as a small grin appeared on the otherwise stoic face.

"Aye sir."

Cole turned his attention to the situation at hand.

The Fleet was streaking out of its low orbit, the leading edges of their Plasma Barriers burning red as they skirted the edge of the ruined planet's atmosphere.

Frost's mono tone cut in.

"Ships ready to fire. Del Rio has slaved your firing solutions to his ship. Firing In fiveâ€¦Fourâ€¦Threeâ€¦."

Cole gritted his teeth in a arch of pain as he spoke.

"Detonate Mines."

The signal from the wounded UNSC Flagship beamed off one of its secondary laser link arrays, aimed precisely at a tiny two meter S.T.A.R.S micro-sat, and after affirming the link in a half second sent the signal towards the stealthed UNSC Prowler, floating silently through the battlefield on near zero emissions and under photo-reactive cloak.

The Prowler in turn then sent the command to the three nuclear mines coasting towards the Imperial fleet under carefully masked RCS thrusters and their initial launch velocity.

At a range of 200 miles in front of the surviving Imperial warships and in between their view of Harvest and the likely exit point of the UNSC Fleet's slingshot orbit, they detonated.

Three Thirty Megaton Suns burst forth into existence in front of the Imperial vessels. Gamma radiation and EMP from the blasts white-washed the sensitive sensors of the Imperials as the wavering plumes of gas and plasma dissipated in the vacuum.

Hopefully they would not be able to see what was coming next and evade.

In the twilight regions on the other side of the planet, magnetic

accelerator cannons flared, briefly illuminating the tiny pin-pricks of light that was the fourteen UNSC ships as they shot into high orbit. Twenty two slugs of steel and tungsten massing one hundred and two hundred tons rocketed into space at 7,000 kilometers per secondâ€¦|.

..And curved ever so slightly from the gravitational distortion of Harvest towards the Imperial ships .

The angular Imperial warships' engines flared bright as they tried to break formationâ€¦|.

â€¦|But it was far too late.

Eight rounds clearly, and painfully missed.

The other fourteen didn't.

The targeted ships lit up as their shields absorbed the massive kinetic energy.

They careened backwardâ€¦|

And four of them slowed, and stoppedâ€¦|.undamaged from the MAC strikes and several hundred megaton to one gigaton level kinetic energy transfers.

The other four, including one of the smaller wedge shaped Imperial Cruiser analogues, didn't.

Their distressed shields shattered and their hulls cratered inward. Fire fountained as their plasma and energy lines clearly vented along with dozens of ruptured decks as explosive decompression tore through them mercilessly before their frames gave in and they bent, buckled, and shattered.

The few remaining crew screamed wildly as Del Rio and the other 13 UNSC Ships emerged from behind the curve of Harvest, their drives burning white as they accelerated out of the gravity fields and frantically recharged their weapons as they fired off their remaining stocks of Archer missiles at the Imperial vessels.

"Imperial warships are accelerating sir! Reading massive amounts of energy building up!" Frost noted with growing alarm.

"Enemy Alpha strike? Order Rio to go evasive!" Cole half shouted.

The four remaining Imperial vessels, one of them the last remaining 1600 meter wedge shaped monstrosity of a battleship along with two smaller cruisers and a clam bowed destroyer, streaked towards the UNSC ships at frightening speeds.

Was this a suicide charge?

They could not hope to win now.

Yes they would take more UNSC ships with them butâ€¦|..

"Unknown energy build up! Sir! Itsâ€¦|" Frost uncharacteristically

shouted before on the view screens the four enemy ships seemed to elongate before Cole's very eyes.

Their engines burned as bright as a star for an instant before in a flash they elongated visibly even more and shot forward at incredible speed, before disappearing in flashes of Cherenkov radiation.

The bridge was silent for almost ten full seconds before Cole turned to the avatar of Frost.

"What, In the hellâ€¦.was that?"

"An as of yet undiscovered form of Faster Than Light Travel sir. Possibly based on the ability to bend space or particles that travel faster than light. However the presence of Cherenkov radiation points to that being possibly a different level of space but radically different to slipspace." The AI replied.

Cole let those words sink in before the sensor operator called out from the half empty and trashed bridge.

"Sir another one of those strange emissions. This time three smaller troop ship like contacts that emerged from the downed enemy flagship."

The viewscreen turned to show the disabled Imperial Battleship, with all of its very visible battle damage, floating helplessly and trailing a plume of debris as three tri-winged ships detached themselves from a large lower hangar and flashed out of existence like the larger Imperial warships.

Cole noticed that one stayed a full second longer than the others before it too disappeared in the same strange manner, just before the lifeless Imperial battleship from whence it came turned into a small star, likely from self destruction.

"Sir." Frost cut in, "I have received a non-encrypted message from that Imperial ship."

"Mal-ware and virus scans?" Cole asked, raising an eyebrow.

"All clear sir. It contains a simple message sir."

Cole leaned forward.

"And that is?"

"_A worthy opponent. We shall meet again. Thrawn._"

Now it was Cole's turn to be surprised.

"Chivalry in the 26th century sir?" Keyes asked.

Cole sighed, using his arms to right himself in his seat as he moved his lifeless legs with his hands.

"Apparently."

Preston Cole turned to Frost.

"The scans from planet-side?"

"Yes sir. Transferred to your data pad."

Cole read over the report for a solid five minutes, only pausing to order Commander Del Rio and his ships to begin recovery operations and for the Carrier Musashi to rejoin the fleet and establish a CAP with her remaining Longswords along with the two Phoenix Class Marine Assault Ships from their positions at the edge of the system.

Cole set down the data pad and turned to the AI.

"Inform General Kitts that the enemy is occupying Utgard with significant forces and is employing an energy dome similar to a Tesla Dome over the entire city. I believe they will have set up significant surface to orbit batteries and AA defenses. Forward this data to him and tell him we have a full scale invasion and will need to employ Level Three Mobile Armored Warfare Forces in theatre with full support."

Cole paused as three medics made their way towards him.

"These Imperials likely have captured civilians with them, and we are under orders to retake Harvest. So simply MAC'ing them is not an option."

Cole took one last look at Lieutenant Keyes.

"Until I am back and Wien is out of medical you have the ship."

The young Lieutenant's eyes widened for a second before he saluted.

"Yes sir!"

As the Medics laid the crippled Preston Cole on a medical gurney he took one last look at his data pad, and the high level images of the occupied city of Utgard covered by a translucent energy dome with enemies and massive weapons towers visible among the cluttered cityscape.

"Time to send in the Marines."

I'll say it once, and I'll say it againâ€¦|.please review!****

10. Chapter 10

****I again want to thank you all for the response and support for this fic, the positive response has been overwhelmingly, and again I want to thank yall for all the reviews and feedback.****

****Im so sorry for the delay.****

****IMPORTANT NOTE! I've decided to make certain members of the ODSTs older than they appear in cannon and changed their date of birth to fit into the timeline.****

****ALSO- For the UNSC Grizzly II Tank, imagine it based off of the**

Linear Tank from Gundam Wing.**

**UNSC Spirit of Fire**

General Kitts blinked several times to make sure that he was seeing everything correctly on the V3D display in front of him as the recording cut off.

"Is this right?" he asked the man next to him, the long time captain of the two mile long gargantuan vessel, James Cutter.

Cutter's brow and mustache rose as he sighed, just as the Avatar of the _Spirit of Fire's_ enigmatic Artificial Intelligence, known as Serena, flashed into existence in the nearest holo table in the expansive Combat Information Center buried deep within the bowels of the Marine Assault Ship.

"It is sir. The _Everest_ and our fleet all received the message approximately ten minutes ago." The AI replied in a matter of fact tone.

Kitts muttered a curse as he clenched his fists.

"So that Imperial general, that bitchâ€¦..what was her nameâ€¦?"

"Ivani." Serena interjected.

Kitts nodded, "Yes, her. She has ten thousand civilians hostage along with a group of Marines, under this energy dome of hers."

Kitts paused as officers ran to and from their stations, shouting reports and coordinating their efforts as the _Spirit of Fire_ along with the fellow Assault Ship _Proxima's Blaze_ began their deceleration burn to place them in a high geostationary orbit around Harvest.

"What is the layout and disposition of the enemy forces and readings on that energy dome?"

The viewscreens morphed, and instantly the familiar surroundings of the CIC were replaced as the V3D screens kicked on as the forty three year old veteran General and his captain found themselves looking at a high altitude overlay of the metropolitan area of Utgard.

Serena cleared her throat unnecessarily.

"The energy barrier uses an unknown form of energy waves and magnetic manipulation. The diameter of the dome is approximately twenty miles and at its apex is more than six miles tall. Big Eye UAV and orbital Charon Spy drones deployed from the fleet have picked up energy readings to suggest that this thing could withstand enough punishment that anything we hit it with that could punch through it like our MACs would obliterate the surrounding area and cause even further devastation to the region."

Several animations and a series of readouts played out on the side of his field of vision as Cutter cleared his throat.

Kitts nodded, "Can we see anything inside the dome?"

The AI shook her head.

"We can visibly see what are likely surface to orbit batteries, the general skyline and what might be another starship beneath the dome, but none of our sensors can see through it. The lack of an overly strong Electro magnetic signature means that this is likely a completely different form of shielding like their capitol ships."

"So not like our own Tesla Domes and Atmospheric Plasma Barriers?" Cutter asked as he paced, taking a closer look at the image within his vision path, pinching the image with his hands to zoom in.

Cutter was referring to the UNSC's last line of defense for significant planetary installations that were under threat of orbital bombardment, the Tesla Dome, named for the legendary Nikola Tesla who theorized them and even filed a patent for them with the United States Patent office. Sometimes referred to as a Tesla Shield, it was a spherical or hemispherical barrier of intense electromagnetic energy which could be scaled to be large enough to cover a small city. The spherical field of highly charged energy was such that any kind of object such as a missile encountering it is instantly destroyed or had its electronics fried. In the case of the common triple layer domes not even radiation could get across the EM barrier while a MAC strike would cause irreparable damage to a planet's entire region. The invention and deployment of Tesla Domes alongside surface to orbit batteries of electron beam weaponry and Mass Drivers had been what forced a revitalization and reemergence of armored mechanized warfare and large formations of heavily armed ground forces in the 25th century during the Insurrection and Rebellion war.

"No, not at all. From the few scans we can get of enemy troop movements they are able to either selectively drop portions of the shield or friendly forces can simply pass through."

Kitts shook his head and changed the overlay of the entire region, as icons went to highlight the areas where Imperial movements had been identified from orbit.

"They have already knocked out a few of our low flying Big Eyes" he muttered in reference to the five meter long saucer shaped high altitude recon drones that could remain on station for five days in the high stratosphere.

Serena cut in as yet more readouts and icons populated the screen, along with a red shaded zone that extended nearly fifty kilometers in a roughly spherical perimeter around Utgard.

"Imperial ground formations and vehicles have been seen securing the general perimeter. However outside of some trace readings and some visible sightings we have very limited data on the forces the Imperials have. Our sensor readings, even LIDAR, are being distorted. All we have is visual."

"So active jamming. Any idea where they are?" Kitts asked as the room morphed and various spectroscopic readouts appeared on the side of the screen.

"A general idea sir. Our micro sats have been able to pick up areas where the jamming appears to be at its apex, where all of our sensors are completely blacked out." Serena replied as the areas where the Imperial jammers were located, as indicated by blackened circles on the map.

Kitts looked closer as he cross referenced the locations.

"So the former Newton Armory, the Utgard Spaceport and the Harvest Reactor Complex." Kitts thought aloud.

"We shouldn't get our ships within the horizon line of the city." Cutter cut in as he continued.

"They have to have some serious surface to orbit batteries beneath that dome and mobile ones outside it. So providing any orbital support would put our ships in too much danger. Especially after the losses the fleet took."

Kitts cringed.

In his thirty years of service he had never seen the fleet take such losses, especially in its heavy hitting Cruisers. Looking on the viewscreens beforehand at the wreckage that now littered the space around Harvest's gravity well gave him pause for the difficulty of the battle at hand.

He put those thoughts to the side as he swept the holographic screen to the side and brought up the men and the material that each monstrous assault ship carried within along with each Division of Marines.

"What are your orders?" Serena asked pensively as her Avatar crossed its arms.

"Full scale Armored assault. A staged Three dimensional full level envelopment. The ODSs are gonna hit those jammers first and hit them hard so we can see the bastards. Sub-orbital space jumps are the only way for them to get in." Kitts spoke as the animation played out on the viewscreen.

"At the same time our F-99 Wombats will hit them with full scale airstrikes on any targets of opportunity supported by squadrons of Longswords to give them air cover and draw fire from them as our Vultures will provide fire support with their Slyver-Laval Cruise Missiles and Micro MACs on general locations of Imperial positions when we can see them or when the Jammers are knocked out. However I'm expecting their Air defenses to be tight, so with non-line of sight targeting the Fleet can fire a salvo of Archers to pass over the enemy air defenses before the ODSs hit dirt to draw even more fire off them and maybe get one through on a concentration of enemies."

Cutter and the other officers present nodded in understanding as Kitts finished.

"At the same time I want our Pod Heavy Lift Landing Ships and Pelicans to de-orbit out of their line of fire on the other side of Harvest and fly in from two directions, one from the Northern pole

and the other from the Eastern hemisphere and offload our full contingent of Armored forcesâ€¦Grizzly II's, Rhino's, Tarantulas, Wolverinesâ€¦all of them, and all of our Marines to launch a ground assault on the Imperial forces from two directionsâ€¦" The general spoke as the simulation played out as if it were in real time before them.

"â€¦The force from the North is to help capture and secure the Newton Armory and the Eastern Assault will be based along the Bifrost Super Highway and the Bifrost Plains. Both will move simultaneously and pincer the bastards. If the ODS'Ts' assaults go well we will be able to direct fire to cover them from our platforms and offloaded Rhino's and allow them to exfil on Pelican Gunships to our advancing ground forces."

Kitts finished as he looked up, taking in the controlled emotions of the crew and his officers, some no doubt masking emotions with doses from their spinal inserts.

**UNSC Proxima's Blaze**

**Main Launch Deck**

Lance Corporal Edward Buck followed the line of Marines heading towards the armory and their assigned weapons locker, almost thoughtlessly remaining in step with his fellow squadmates as they made their way from the lockers with their reaction suit which all Marines wore under their armor.

"Man I can't believe the losses the fleet took." grumbled his fellow squad member Dutch, better known as Taylor Miles as they went to the expansive armory which was filled with Marines putting on their reactive fiber suits and their armor.

Buck simply grunted in reply.

Buck, a now 23 year old from the Inner Colony world of Draco III in the Beta Durandal system, had originally joined the Colonial Guard to both pay for college and for the fact that he like many other men and women his age that grew up in the later half of the insurrection, the Cold War and the Rebellion war had developed a sense of nationalism for their respective colony worlds who were aligned with the UNSC. He had wanted to after he was done with his five years, two of which he completed, to finish college and be done with the Colonial Guard.

However after nearly two years of putting down various riots and shooting protestors on former URF Worlds with the usual K-Volts and working the Guard's usual policing duties he had only actually even been armed with the Guard's rarely used and archaic MA37 Airbursting munitions Rifle once in an emergency situation on the former URF Rebel Capitol world of Sirius. Thus, he began to crave real action.

Buck had originally intended to join the UNSC Army, which, unlike the Marines, were primarily a light mechanized infantry force that primarily operated drones. However after going through the initial screening process Wit had found he was eligible to enter the Marine Corps, a chance that he leapt at after only a half hour's contemplation at a local pub.

The UNSC Marine Corps had always been the most hard charging and militarized of the services, but compared to their humble former Pre-Rebellion and Colonization Era selves where humanity became peaceful and complacent, they were a military class that approached the militarization of ancient warrior cultures with just enough blending with the post colonization age Professional Soldier.

After another year of the most grueling training, military grade spinal inserts and limited physical augmentation, Buck had emerged at the top of his graduating class, eligible for the most prestigious and daunting training of all time, Orbital Drop Shock Trooper training.

As he and the other members of his squad continued their march to the Armor Fitting Machines he reminisced about the two more years of Space Jump Insertion training, Hot Orbital HEV Drop school and Special operations he had gone through before emerging six months ago as a certified ODST.

And now he would get to use his hard earned skills in combat, but unlike a few of his fellow ODSTs and Marines, he was more than apprehensive about the upcoming op, especially after they emerged from briefing.

He was going up against an unknown enemy, with unknown capabilities, and with limited intel, intel which would be his and his fellow ODST's mission to make available.

Making their way into the armor fitting room Buck, and the others made the difficult transition into their Carbon Nano-Suits which formed and contorted to each soldiers' form as the artificial synthetic muscles flexed and expanded, greatly amplifying his strength and endurance while providing an almost impervious barrier against nearly all projectile weapons save for mil-spec, just as the robotic armatures that the ODSTs and Marines stood under began securing the two inch thick composite outer armor plating shell of Titanium A fused with a thin layer of depleted uranium, starting with the double fist Hydrogen boosted Nanite Mitochondrian Power Reaction Pack.

For the ODSTs, their Power Suits, which were for all intensive purposes the same as those worn by the regular Marines, were distinguished by their black digital camo finish and the ODST insignia on their chest plates.

The helmet finally slide over his head as the as the HUD came to life, showing the helmet's built in Radar, Motion tracker, IFF, targeting systems and a video feed of the outside world as he walked to one of the expansive weapons racks.

"How long do you reckon this war is gonna last?" Another of his squadmates, a Luna born known as Mickey whom had originally joined the military as part of the mandatory program for foster children, grabbed his standard issue 4mm Mattock Gauss Rifle as he was one of the Squad's three Marksman.

Buck shook his head in muted response as he grabbed his assigned MA6B and its ammunition, eight ammunition strips, four of which were attached to his hip plates and three on his lower back under his

reactor hump, while the eighth was loaded into his rifle.

Finally he slid three 40 mm stacked programmable airburst grenades into weapon's underbarrel launcher before each ODSST attached a small box attachment to the right forearms of their armor as the attachments synched with their armor.

The voice of his suit's dumb Combat Intelligence chimed in as icons streamed across his HUD before Buck blinked them away.

"_M-22 Dagger Micro Missile system online. Four projectiles ready and synched to neural targeting."_

Himself, Dutch, Mickey and the others finished and walked over to the other eight members of his squad assembled amongst the dozens of others.

The leader of his squad, a fiery woman from the Inner Colonies of African descent, Sergeant Reyona Ludmilla or "Ludee", waved them over to their assigned Pelicans that were making their finally preps before being loaded into their launch decks.

Buck stole a glance past the dozens of other Pelicans loading up with ODSSTs and into the cavernous main hangar deck that was teeming with activity as Marines, Drones, crew and their vehicles were prepped and loaded up into their respective Pelicans, Heavy Lift Drop Vehicles or launch tubes.

A fact that was underscored as the deck seemed to vibrate under his feet as the intimidating and looming form of a M-1000 Grizzly II Main Battle Tank slowly cruised past, making its way to its assigned HLV Drop Ship, its four tracks slightly squealing against the deck as one of its two crew stood on top of the turret making final checks on the magnetic rails of the tank's single massive 130mm Gauss Cannon, making sure the MBT's main weapon was ready to accelerate a tungsten dart to 4.8 kilometers per second.

"Alright boys and girls lets load up!" Ludmilla shouted as the ODSSTs did a final check on their gear before jogging up the loading ramp of the Pelican.

Buck was quiet as the doors sealed and secured the ODSSTs in, choosing to merely make his way over to the rack of secured equipment that he and the others would soon be strapping onto their backs.

The Jet Wings, better known as wingsuits, were the secondary way for ODSSTs to insert themselves from orbit and onto a target.

Jumping from a Pelican in the high Magnetosphere of a planet, the ODSSTs would each dive down through the atmosphere before extending the folded wings and igniting the small jet engines embedded in their wings, maneuvering through any hostile weapons fire and landing onto their target.

This would be his first Orbital space jump.

Space jumps were even more dangerous to the ODSST than the traditional HEV drop pod, however if an opponent had modern anti air defenses HEVs, burning through the atmosphere like they did, yet still slower than a hypersonic missile, were just easy to pick out and shoot

down.

The Pelican vibrated under his feet and accelerated away from the blazing sun.

"Five minutes to jump!" Ludmilla shouted.

"Great." Dutch moaned as he hefted on the wingsuit as Buck did the same, waiting for the computers to synch with his suit as altimeter information and diagnostics ran down the HUD to be blinked away.

"Remember. Our target is the Newton Armory. The Wombat's are launching their attacks now in concert for our jump. The priority is to knock out any air to air batteries and the jamming devices the Imperials are using." Ludmilla barked as Buck and the other ODSs nodded.

"We will be fighting an entrenched opponent with Technology likely on par or greater than our own. We have little intel on them but that is what our mission is. We need to give the fleet a better look at the enemy as we assault them so they don't go in blind. Only we do."

The woman paused as she looked up each and every ODS in the troop bay, taking in their movements underneath their layers of sealed armor and carbon nano tube.

"But that is why we are ODSs! We will do what the other pussies cant and we will go feet first into hell!" she shouted.

Roars of approval met her speech as Buck nodded, going over the briefing in his mind before the green light at the rear of the troop compartment lit up with a resounding alarm.

"_Nearing drop altitude. Skirting edge of atmosphere. Operation Homeland Shield is commencing."_ The automated CI voice of the pilot-less Pelican announced.

The air in the compartment began to pumped out as the ODSs readied themselves and lined up in order of their jump.

Buck was the first to go.

"_Opening Bay doors."_

The bay door dropped open and Buck found himself staring out at the expanse of stars, with Harvest spinning underneath him miles below, allowing him to make out the scars and craters left by the Imperial's bombardment. In the distance he could see the flickering forms of three dozen more Pelicans loaded with ODSs about to do the same thing that he was. Eleven more Pelicans worth of ODSs squads (Twelve men apiece) would be joining him and his squad in their assault on the Newton Armory.

"On my mark!" Ludmilla announced as Buck swallowed, trying not to look down and reminding himself that the M-55 powered assault armor was rated for atmospheric re-entry at shallow angles within the magnetosphere.

He could hear his heart humping in his chest as he tried to clear his

mind and focus on the mission, only being partially successful as he gave up and allowed a small dose of drugs with a blink onto his HUD from his spinal inserts to pour into his blood stream and focus his mind.

"Mark!"

Buck leapt from the Pelican, straightened his form, and dove towards the planet below, the first of over a Hundred ODST to plunge through the atmosphere of Harvest.

__**Imperial Command Center**__

"So you are saying that these three "Marines" very nearly killed us all with a â€|thermonuclear device?" Field Marshal Ivani blinked as the holographic form of one of her officers nodded.

"Yes ma'am. It was a device the size of a large oversized thermal detonator. Not very powerful but I believe they planned on using our own shield to multiply its destructive power by detonating it within the shield dome."

Ivani sighed.

They had been lucky to capture those rats when they did, but now she had a battle to fight, and its beginning stages were starting to unfold.

"Affirmative. Ivani out." She replied and waived away the holoscreen and turned to the main holographic tactical displays and the officers gathered around them giving out reports.

She had been wondering how the UNSC would respond to her communication to them about her hostages, wondering if the revelation would change their resolve or at the least keep them from simply vapping her from orbit along with the entire region.

No it looked like they were going to attack none-the less.

However to her, this attack looked like nothing she had seen any opponent do against her, only having studied them in officers school.

They were going to attempt a full envelopment attack.

Starting with a massive aerial assault, and waves of missiles.

Ivani clenched her fist.

"Shoot them down!"

>Her XO nodded, "Yes maam our TIEs are moving to intercept, however sensors detecting a number of very high altitude gunships de-orbiting andâ€|..Wait! I've got hundreds of more contacts that are almost too faint to detect appearing on and off our sensors coming down from high orbit."<p>

The senior officers all seemed to try and spurt out a wave of information all at once, forcing Ivani to hold up her hand and silence them.

"I want our TIEs to focus on all enemy fighters and our AT-AA's, XR-85 Tank Droids, and deployed Anti Air Turrets to establish an air defense perimeter and take out any missiles heading our way."

The men nodded and began shouting orders to their subcommanders as she took note of the situation as the controlled chaos went on around her.

The UNSC was probably going to hit her jamming towers that she had set up at the three key points outside and around the city, however with what. She had no idea.

Likely they would be trying to soften up their defenses before dropships would come in and hit the jammers, which she didn't doubt they could locate, as already UNSC droids had been shot down getting too close to their position.

Her XO, Matien Kal was at her side.

"What about our main forces of AT-ATs and the Hells Hammers?"

The 112th Repulsor Lift Armored Regiment, and their fearsome Commander, Colonel Zel Johans, were the ace up her sleeve.

Having proved themselves dozens of times against the Rebels and other opponents in the Outer Rim, the 112th and their rather raucous commander, were one of the more elite armored units in the entire Imperial Armed forces. And as soon as she knew where the UNSC would launch its assault from, she would send them outside of the city's shield, along with 2M fighter tanks, and half of her reserve force of AT-AAs and Tank Droids and supporting units to meet the UNSC's advance.

She wanted to hold her most powerful forces, the AT-ATs, back until she knew for sure that the UNSC wouldn't attempt a pincer attack, which she was expecting.

If necessary she could split them into two wings to establish a line to meet the UNSC from two directions, with the AT-ATs powerful weapons and anti air and infantry support to meet a UNSC advance.

If that were the case though she would have to be sure to use them more as a counter offensive force and hold them within the defenses of her anti air units and remaining fighters, most likely in the urbanized outskirts where she could maximize her Stormtroopers and allow the 112th with its far quicker and deadly S-1 FireHawke Heavy Repulsortanks, 2-M Fighter Tanks and X-85 Tank droids to do battle on the much more open plains from the north.

She would hold her artillery close to the city, and was not going to release her Lancet Gunships until the threat of those UNSC fighters remained.

"Ma'am! Enemy Droid Airspeeders have made contact with our CAP TIE Interceptors! They are coming in at over 5,000 kilometers per hour!" an officer shouted as she turned to the holoscreens to watch the chaos unfold.

A flash of concern appeared on Ivani's face.

5,000 km per hour in atmosphere? These UNSC types didn't have deflector shields, and for the most part those energy walls on their capitol warships were the only thing she had seen that was close.

A TIE or even X-Wing was limited to 1,500 km per hour in an atmosphere, although the X-wings or starfighters with shields could use them to travel up to 2,000 km per hour in low atmosphere, gaining speed and achieving orbit the higher up in the atmosphere of a planet they went.

Surely they would have to slow down.

â€¦

F-99 Wombats had built up a reputation in their nearly one-hundred and twenty years of service. One of speed, maneuverability, agility.

Their hybrid air breathing rocket SABRE engines allowed the drones, all two hundred that were baring down on the Imperial TIE fighters in the initial wave, to tear towards them as they completed their de-orbit burns at Mach seven, the leading edge of their composite frames burning orange from the air friction.

Their onboard intelligence selected their weapons load outs and their targets as their enemies hurtled towards them, and their phased array radars locked onto their perspective targets.

Just as the two forces closed to within 80 miles of each other, with one last hypersonic boom, anti air Anvil III missile tore away from their internal launch bays of the arrowhead shaped craft, and streaked towards their targets on trails of fire from their small Scramjet engines.

As with any battle, the first realm where battle was engaged was in the spectra of electronic countermeasures.

TIE Pilots immediately reacted, throwing their ECM suites to full power to try and throw off the missiles.

Dozens of UNSC missiles tumbled out of formation, only to tear themselves apart with the sudden structural stress from Mach 6.

However as soon as the onboard computers on the remaining missiles detected the targeting interference, the seeker warheads switched to their LIDAR and Thermal detection systems, ignoring the Imperial ECM.

The Imperial TIE immediately threw their fighters into wild maneuvers to try and avoid the missiles as they closed the distance, while others, managing to achieve locks with their Blaster Cannons, fired at the Drones before spinning away.

The surviving UNSC missiles, half a minute after they were fired, tore into the ranks of the TIEsâ€¦

â€¦

**Imperial Command Center**

"Pull those TIE's back to the defensive perimeter of our anti air batteries!" Ivani half shouted as the attacking TIEs were reduced by a quarter of their number, many of them simply turned into expanding and tumbling clouds of fireballs and shrapnel as under a tenth of the Droid Airspeeders were knocked from the skies by energy blasts.

"Yes maam." The officer replied as the chaos continued to unfold and the shouting of status updates became even more constant and deafening.

The TIEs were speeding back to the airspace protected by the Imperial ground batteries as the range between the two forces closed, and dogfighting ensued, the pilotless UNSC Drone fighters using superior maneuverability to counter the TIE's superior weaponry, as craft from both sides tore contrails across the skies and explosions and buffs of dark oily fireballs signaled the defeat of one opponent and the victory of another.

Ivani clenched her fist ever so tighter as yet more TIE's fell from the skies, overwhelmed by shockingly hyper maneuverable UNSC droid fighters before the first high velocity bolts of energy flak from AT-AAs began to provide covering fire for her fighters.

The enemy fighters found themselves enveloped by a wall of violently expanding energy spheres and the successive shockwaves of violently displaced atmosphere, leaving many to be blow out of the skies or forced to break off their attacks to attempt to survive.

The skies of the early dawn were lit up with hundreds of brief and tiny suns flashing in and out of existence in an oversized fireworks show per the energy flak of AT-AAs, buying most of the TIE fighter reprieve as the Wombats Combat Intelligences made the logical defensive maneuver to dive for the surface, managing to take out several more TIE's with brief missile locks or the occasional burst of cannon fire just before a dozen more unmanned UNSC Fighters met their fiery ends from precision laser fire from X-85 Droid Tanks as motes of energy speared through their fragile frames, leaving the now supersonic debris to shatter to pieces before tumbling to a remaining piece of Harvest un-glassed landscape

Just as the first wave of Vulture launched Slyver-Laval Hypersonic Cruise Missiles and screening Archer Missiles fired from the Fleet came screaming into the Imperial airspace, spearing through the air like comets and leaving expanding shockwaves in their wake.

Ivani meanwhile screamed at the her pilots to knock down the high altitude Archers as several droid tanks and ground batteries disappeared from the screen, victim to the remaining UNSC fighters that slipped in amongst her airspace and began to cause havoc with gun runs and missile strikes.

Not noticed by her however were some three hundred barely detectable contacts falling through the atmosphere from orbit

...

AC-220 Vulture Gunship****

"_**Cyclone 4**_"

Flight Lieutenant David McGregor felt like his balls had crawled up past his stomach and into his ribcage, a feeling that only disappeared once the Vulture leveled out at 30,000 feet, some twenty thousand feet below where it had been seconds ago.

"Enemy missile averted." The pilot, Barry Divolis , nearly shouted through the comms, almost betraying his own terror.

McGregor looked past the viewscreen and the streaking landscape of Harvest, most of it burned with large black impact craters, at the V3D display of the battlespace.

It was nearly incomprehensible chaos as thousands of angry red icons dominated the area of the display's map that was the area around the occupied city of Utgard, appearing more like an angry , fifty kilometer in diameter circle with a donut like hole in the center—the energy dome that no sensors could penetrate.

Although the fleeting targeting data they got on the enemy outside the dome wasn't much better, even with his sensors data-linked into those of the Big Eye drones, low orbit Charon Micro Sats and the few Wombats that had managed to penetrate the Imperial's air space.

McGregor saw brief images of strange two legged armored walkers, beetle like quadruped vehicles with what had to be those energy flak weapons that had effectively turned the surrounding atmosphere into a nearly impenetrable energy storm, some sort of hover tank and dozens of other enemy emplacements that disappeared off the screen as soon as they appeared.

Circling briefly inside the sphere of enemy icons were the wildly maneuvering blue icons of the Wombat Drone Fighters, as surrounding the red sphere was a circle of blue icons fast moving to strike from every direction.

"Set our missiles to self seeking mode, targets to be any of opportunity. Maybe we can get lucky and hit a jammer or AAA site before the ODSs hit dirt." Divolis replied as McGregor input the proper firing codes to the primary armament of the venerable AC-220 Vulture, its sixteen Tanix Defense Systems Slyver-Laval Multipurpose Hypersonic Cruise Missiles.

"Weapons hot!" McGregor shouted as the holographic screens flashed by his helmet field of vision as he blinked through the systems check as the craft's CI read the system's check aloud.

"Magnetic Acceleration Cannon online. Single One-Five-Five millimeter projectile loaded. Capacitors charged."

"Twin linked GUA-23/AW/Linkless Feed Autocannons, 40 mm, ready."

"Argent V Anti-Air Missile Pods. Ready."

"Slyver-Laval Hypersonic Scram Missiles. Ready"

McGregor turned and nodded to his co-pilot, just as the Vulture

dipped past a few more thousand feet while its complex radar and ECM suite forced an Imperial concussion missile to strike a sensor ghost miles away.

"Missile trajectories set. Four from high altitude, four set to terrain hugging mode."

The Vulture's CI gave a shrill warning. "_Level One weapons authority authorized."_

McGregor paused for only a moment, this was his first time to fire Slyvers in a combat opâ€¦..

"_Firing!"_

Hexagonal micro silo caps on the Vulture's fuselage's flanks, as the CI released the launch codes and attack vectors for an offensive attack run.

The Missiles, hardly resembling anything akin to their ancient Tomahawk forbears, rocketed away on a pillars of flame on their secondary boost phase rockets, arced, and separated away as the boosters separatedâ€¦and the main Scramjets ignited.

Burning without a perceptible exhaust, the missiles accelerated to Mach 2â€¦4â€¦6â€¦then 8, leaving the supersonic diving Vulture looking like it was sitting still as the missiles separated to begin their attack runsâ€¦.

Eight among nearly three hundred launched from the UNSC's 40 Vultures, all of them swarming in from every direction as the skies lit up with thunderous motes of energy flak while dozens of lancing streaks of fireballs hailed the converging strike of Archer missiles curving around Harvest's atmosphere.

â€¦...

The Slyver-Laval Multi-role Attack Combat Fusion Mace Munitions Missiles fired from Cyclone 8, usually known to UNSC personnel as a Scram Missile for short, was simply an upgraded version of a weapon system introduced by the United States for use on wet Navy Missile Destroyers during the Sino-American Wars of the 2030s and the Euro-Russian War of 2038.

However just because it was a multi-century old weapon system did not mean that it was still not one of the most deadly non-orbital, non-nuclear, non-magnetically accelerated weapon systems of the 25th century military of a star striding humanity.

After reaching the speed necessary to activate their Scramjets, the missiles soon dumped their boost phase rockets, and split onto their attack vectors.

Four of the missiles maintained their arching high altitude vectors, while the other four streaked down to within a hundred feet of the planets earth on a low level terrain hugging strike.

These missiles furiously swept the surrounding terrain with their CI run sensors as the missiles kept a tight laser link between themselves, relaying any information that they received amongst each

other.

All the while as they maneuvered a mere fifty feet above the landscape of Harvest at Mach 8, their shockwaves splintering trees and creating a wake of debris thrown into the air while maneuvering fins adjusted their course hundreds of times a second with minute corrections to keep them from careening into the ground or a hill.

As the Missiles closed the Imperial anti air batteries, already firing at full tilt at F-99 Drones that survived just long enough to create chaos among the Imperial's lines, swiveled and detected the much more dangerous threat of the Scram Missiles and the de-orbiting Archer Missiles.

The Imperials found themselves facing a classic four layer aerial assault. Whereby the 1st layer was the surviving waves of Wombat fighters fighting for control above their airspace and making strikes on targets of opportunity, the second layer was the high altitude Archer missiles coming in from a near vertical attack angle, packing a much more potent punch and playing the role of forcing the enemy to direct much needed anti air weapons on them. This would allow the much more maneuverable Scram Missiles attacking from above, the third layer, to have a much greater chance of success while their more visible sensor views of the enemy thanks to their angle would allow them to identify targets much more easily than the low level Scram Missiles. These missiles, with the use of data and laser links with orbiting drones, would forward more updated targeting information to the fourth layer of the assault; the low altitude Scram Missiles who would be screaming in low enough to avoid detection until the last minute.

Lines of laser bolts, streaking anti-missile missiles and furious strobes of energy flak permeated the skies, while TIE fighters boosted to their maximum atmospheric speeds to intercept the Archer Missiles, which began to fall by the dozen from strobes of laser cannon fire from the Imperial fighters and the pin point targeting of Tank Droid main guns.

Imperial electronic counter measures, aided by the Jamming towers, scrambled about half of the high altitude Slyver-Lavals, sending some spiraling out of control, either to break apart or to slam into the ground, while others switched to active tracking modes.

These radar emissions got many of them targeted by Imperial AT-AAs, and their mission ended within a brief miniature sun of exploding plasma and energy.

The others managed to get brief target locks on Imperial positions, some being AT-AA sites, a grouping of Imperial walkers or the thermal capture of a large number of enemy soldiers hidden in a skyscraper outside of the shield dome, and angled their attack vector and targeting locks to them before a wave of electronic interference blocked them from targeting locks.

Anti missile fire from the Imperials reached fever pitch, striking missile left and right as the high and low Slyvers streaked into the outskirts of Utgard, and the low flying cruise missiles got their final targeting data from orbiting drones and the missiles that sacrificed themselves.

Flaps on their stubby wings purred to and fro â€|dodging hostile anti air fire for some, others failing and being speared by energy.

For others it was simply making final course corrections with the economy of movement required at Mach 8.

The Missiles thundered through the hellishly accurate storm of Imperial anti air fire, and those that survived speared towards their final missionâ€|

An Archer Missile, one of the few that survived drawing off the Imperial's fire from the Slyvers, detonated three hundred meters above the shield domeâ€|sending a two megaton jet of plasma into a wing of TIE Interceptors and briefly blotting out the now rising sun of Epsilon Indi.

An F-99 Wombat, trailing smoke from a scorching near hit, turned its engines to full military thrust and maneuvered above a pack of low flying cruise missiles, escorting them in and drawing fire from several distant AT-AAs and Imperial laser batteries.

The little black drone executed a series of radical evasive maneuvers so tight that any human pilot would have been crushed immediately, dodging a flurry of energy bolts and sending a missile tearing away at a group of AT-STs.

The hypersonic guided dart speared through one of the Imperial war machines in a blinding explosion just as the Drone's luck ran out, and a flurry of high energy explosive flak bursts vaporized most of the fighters mass in an instant.

However , despite all of the Imperial firepower being brought to bear, the distraction of shooting down the Archers, the assailing Wombats, and wiping out most of the high level Scram Missiles, proved more than enough to help overwhelm the Imperial defenses.

As one, the remaining Missiles dove in on their targets.

Again, several of the Slyver-Laval hypersonic missiles found themselves completely overwhelmed by Imperial jamming, particularly from the jamming towers, and careened out of control.

Some struck abandoned buildings, coring through them as their warheads didn't activate, and some hit the ground and detonated their warheads in the process, digging titanic craters in the process.

However most of the surviving Scram Missiles didn't.

The low level terrain hugging missiles screamed in at Mach 8, their titanium hammerhead nose burning red hot as layers of air compressed behind it.

Grass, concrete, abandoned cars, Imperial troopers and even damaged buildings were flattened or blown over as they flew overhead.

Just before each missile reached their target, the Combat Intelligences, using the warheads own sensors, uploaded targeting data and data links from drones, selected multiple targets of

opportunity to strike before detonating the main warhead in conjunction with its remaining fuel.

As the first Scram Missile of the pack reached its target, the Utgard Spaceport just outside the shield dome, a very small, controlled fusion reaction superheated two hundred tungsten slugs and spat them out of their containment cells with enough kinetic energy in each to destroy an armored fighting vehicle completely.

Most of the load punched through a group of AT-STs, anti air turrets and a lone AT-AA spitting fire from their main weapons in a vain attempt to defend themselves from their impending demise.

The kinetic and thermal shock instantly vaporized a significant portion of the targets' mass as the expanding gas, a molecule mix of human tissue, steel and superheated air blew the rest of the Imperial warmachines to Hell and beyond.

The Missile, its objective only partially complete, tore across the runways of the occupied spaceport in an instant, spitting out the rest of its load onto a group of occupied buildings, shredding them in the process, and a large group of unlucky Stormtroopers caught out in the open.

There was nothing left of their bodies to tell that they had even existed in the first place.

Avoiding a laser beam from a tank droid a kilometer away that vaporized a second UNSC Scram Missile inbound on the space port, the lucky missile detonated its main warhead.

A starburst of white light flashed into existence in the center of the Utgard City Spaceport, a mere hundred meters away from one of the UNSC's objectivesâ€|

..One of the three Imperial jamming towers.

The sun like nova bloomed to consume a 500 meter radius, atomizing anything it touched in a fusion based explosion, before the ball of hell and fury collapsed in upon itself, releasing a shockwave of displace air that leveled nearby buildings including the spaceports primary control tower, and threw Imperial vehicles and machines dozens of yards.

The process was repeated nearly two dozen times as the surviving Slyver-Laval cruise missiles unleashed their payloads on doomed Imperial targets.

**Harvest Atmosphere**

Buck saw the sky and earth flashing in rapid succession before his faceplate.

Decades of training took over.

This was just like a parasail drop ... except this time there was no chuteâ€|.only a pair of wings and a set of tiny jet engine boosters strapped onto his armor that were folded closed.

He forced his arms and legs to stay closed and resisted the primal

urge to uselessly claw at the sky.

The HUD and small movements of his body controlled fall while a readout of the altitude and his velocity displayed on the far corner of his vision.

He and the other ODS'Ts nearest him shot through the clouds like a bullet, the black armored forms of men and women holding their arms back and diving through the atmosphere just as the sun peaked on the horizon.

Buck could see the curvature of the planet in all directionsâ€¦and he was streaking from space rocketing to the ground and approachingâ€¦..

A brief jolt signaled that he had just gone supersonicâ€¦

He activated his motion sensors, boosting the range to maximum. His squad appeared as blips on his heads-up display. With a sigh of relief he saw that all 12 of them were present and pulling into a loose wedge formation as the other eight teams in the assault on the Newton Armory did the same.

"_30,000 feet and dropping."_ His Armor's CI said as a countdown timer to deploy his wingsuit popped up.

A trajectory came up on his HUD, displaying the course he and the other ODS'Ts would fly after deploying their wingsuits and jet engines.

They would pull up with a mere 1,000 feet to go and dive to the deck, flying low for just a few moments before landing right on top of their objective.

â€¦Hopefully right after it was softened up by airstrikes or the Scram Missiles.

"Imperial ground forces could be tracking us," Ludmilla told them over the COM. "Expect AA fire."

A lump formed in Buck's stomach.

The ODS'Ts rocketed to the planet below, hitting 20,000 feet and dropping fast.

To the southwest Buck could now see the outline of Utgard, looking strangely serene and beautiful, before Buck caught sight of the towering fluorescent blue energy dome that enveloped much of the city's core.

It looked strangely like a Tesla Dome, but was easily double the size of the military grade scalar fields the UNSC fielded.

"_I can see the Archers coming in now!"_ Dutch called out as the altimeter ticked past 15,000.

Buck risked a sidelong glance and spotted the Archers.

They looked like lances of fire as they tore through the atmosphere well past Mach 10, leaving violent shockwaves in their wake as green

strobes of light stitched lines across the sky towards them.

Imperial anti missile fire began to knock several of them down.

"Get ready to go evasive and deploy your suits!" Ludmilla barked over the com as affirmative light winked on in acknowledgement as the ODSs continued to fall.

10,000 feet.

Buck could see that the airspace around the city was completely covered in a dazzling display of violent green balls of explosions.

Energy flak?

and hundreds of bursts of energy bolts a second that looked like dozens of water sprinklers spitting water on a front lawn, except these were bolts of _energy weapons_ that were knocking down UNSC Missiles and fighters down at a rather alarming rate.

Luckily for them, it seemed that their profiles were too small to notice or the Imperials were too focused on not allowing a Scram Missile or Drone Fighter to blow them to hell to target the ODSs.

Buck's heart was pounding in his chest as the altitude dropped past 5,000 feet.

Buck saw a carpet of green forest, ghostly mountains in the distance, and pillars of smoke rising from the west.

His HUD beeped, signaling it was time to deploy his wingsuit.

With a blink at an icon that dominated the top of his HUD and field of vision, the stubby wings on his back folded open in an instant, belying Buck's and every ODS's fear of malfunction, and his two small jet engines that he was basically wearing spun to life.

Five thousand feet.

The ODSs continued to fall as the air assault reached its fever pitch.

An F-99 Wombat streaked not a mile away from him, dodging a flurry of energy bolts and shooting missiles at an unseen enemy.

Another Drone was atomized as beams from an Imperial fighter caught it, slicing it into two.

An Archer missile, apparently the only one to make it through the defenses detonated above the city, blotting out the sun as his video feed to the outside world polarized to keep him from being blinded by a multi megaton jet of plasma bursting forth into the atmosphere and immolating a dozen Imperial craft.

Buck could see the target now.

The Newton Armory was not the most impressive of military

installations that he had seen or lived in, but its slab sided barracks, command center, hangars and vehicle bays along with landing pads and its squat pyramid shaped main control center looked worse for wear, having dozens of scorch marks on their sides and with windows blown out.

Buck could also see the Imperial vehicles now.

Strange chicken like walkers, actual hover tanks speeding down its lone runway, oversized treaded tanks of some sort with a tall turret that was spitting energy bolts into the sky, and a trio of large, lumbering quadruped walkers with large weapons of some sort on their dorsal flanks spitting balls of energy that exploded into those energy flak.

Before he could speak Ludmilla designated them as targets on his and the others HUDs.

Dutch suddenly shouted onto the comms.

"_Incoming! Go evasive!_"

They had detected them.

The ODSs immediately broke formation and scattered across the sky.

But not before a flurry of energy bolts struck two unlucky ODSs in another squad nearby, simply erasing them from existence.

"_Hit the deck!_" Ludmilla shouted as Buck's training kicked in.

With subtle movements from his armor and his neural link controlling the Wingsuit, Buck rocketed forward with the others and danced across the sky in evasive maneuvers, causing the world to spin as he tried to stay within the approach trajectory on his HUD.

As 600 feet cleared, the ODSs pulled up on their approach, pulling up just in time to not dig their own graves.

"_Shit!_" Mickey cursed out as one of the four legged AAA vehicles swiveled its weapon towards them.

Without hesitating Buck and his squad, now split apart by their fireteam, spun out of the way as Buck actually found himself completing a barrel roll

Just as a blinding green ball of energy burst into existence in a hundred feet in front of him and two his right.

Not even thinking he pulled up, spinning around and over the brief ball of hellfire, missing it by mere meters as he felt his temperature on his side suddenly got hot and temperature warnings shot onto his screen.

Buck checked on the status of his squad.

One of his fellow squadmates, a hardened Rebellion War veteran known as "Robbie", had his vitals flat lined.

How am I supposed to make it if a veteran cant?

A roar rumbled even through his armor, and Buck saw the Imperial anti air vehicle's weapons swivel as fast as they could and begin firing at an unseen enemy.

Three Slyver-Lavals coming in to strike just before they hit.

He was now no more than a mile from the armoryâ€¦..this was cutting it close.

One missile was speared by plasma fire as the other suddenly tumbled out of formation, likely jammed by Imperial ECM as the third Scram Missile, leaving a wake of debris and displaced superheated air in its wake, thundered into the Imperial position at Mach 8.

A titanic explosion and orange streaks of superheated slugs cut through several of the Imperial vehicles, gratifyingly shredding them and one of the lumbering anti air vehicles in the process as the western edge of the military base and the Imperial positions were devastated and vaporized by a white ball of fusion energyâ€¦

Yet still Buck could tell that the enemy's ECM was unscathed, as he could just barely keep in radio contact with his squad.

The Newton Armory was now upon him, and his LZ, the top floor of one of the three story barracks, raced to meet him and the others.

Buck decelerated, and leaned back and directed his thrust to stop him from slamming into or bouncing off the building.

"I've got hostiles!" Ludmilla shouted.

On Buck's HUD four figures were outlined in red on the rooftop they were aiming for.

Imperial Soldiers.

He briefly studied them.

They were humanoids alright, likely human really. However he could not tell what was under thatâ€¦.white?...full armor suit that seemed to hug their body much more than his own power suit.

What he did care about, and his threat detector warned on his HUD, was the unfamiliar weapon with a rather large muzzle and bore being pointed at him.

"Take 'em!" Ludee shouted, just as a crimson bolt of energy tore past Buck, missing him by inches and nearly dazzling him as he cursed.

Right at his most vulnerable maneuver.

Without letting them take another shot at them, or get a lock on them with whatever they could do with those _Energy rifles_, Buck, Mickey Dutch, another two ODSs and Ludmilla raised their micro missile launchers on their right forearms.

Still slowing down his suit immediately locked onto the heat signatures of the Imperials. Buck selected a target as a brief lock on tone chimed while a red box drew itself onto his target, and fired with a thought.

A small 10mm x 50mm Arrow Micro Missile leapt from his wrist mounted launcher, locked onto the Imperial who fired at him a second before as three other missiles from the accompanying ODSs joined his.

The White armored Imperial soldiers dove into cover, but too late as the missiles arced over the cover of the top of the building's facade and struck each of them with gory results.

However right before the missiles struck a trio of bolts from the Imperial soldiers leapt forth and struck an accompanying ODS square in the chest just as the man cleared the rooftop.

The blood red blasts tore into the ODSs power suit, deforming and melting armor plates and a burning carbon nano tubes. The first and second blasts didn't kill the ODS but the third burned through to scorch and eviscerate human tissue, meat and bone.

Another vital sign flatlined on Buck's HUD as he cleared the rooftop.

With another burst from his jet engines, he leaned back, slowed his pace to a crawl, and cut his Wingsuit, landing on the roof of what had been a barracks as he detached his wingsuit with a command from his uplink and unstrapped the MA6 secured to his chest.

The other ODSs landed right next to him, with Mickey coming in faster, tucking into a ball and rolling before getting back up into a combat position.

"Status?" Ludmilla barked, the ODSs now sticking to tight band comms as the other squads of ODSs landed in positions around them and the Armory.

"All green." He replied, not even waiting for orders as he and others as he stacked up on the roof of the building.

The base was in a sense of chaos as the Imperials were disorganized by the Scram missiles strike, but they were quickly moving to regroup and likely set up a defense of the jammer and their AAA units.

"I've got movement below us." Mickey announced over the roar of an F-99 shooting overhead on a low level gun run.

Four red dots appeared on his motion tracker.

"Take them you've got the schematics of the place downloaded?" Ludmilla asked as Buck nodded.

A three dimensional Map of the building morphed into existence on his HUD.

At the same time a small device detached from Dutch's belt, and the man threw the black ball into the air where instead of falling the small device, a tiny drone called a Peaker, hovered and sent an X-Ray into the building below.

On his HUD the ghostly outlines of four Imperial soldiers making their way to the roof with their weapons drawn dominated his field of view.

"Now."

The ODS'Ts sent a stream of hypervelocity tungsten through the roof of the building, MA6's sent out a brief snarl and two Gauss Rifle leant hypersonic barks to the crescendo, chewing through it in an instant and turning instacrete into powder.

Slugs impacted the Imperial troopers, and they danced and jerked like marionette dolls for a second before collapsing to the floor lifeless in the middle of what was one of the main hallways.

"Clear."

Ludmilla nodded, "Off the roof boys. The other squads and drones got sight of where that jammer is. Its highlighted on your HUD. Other targets of opportunity are any Imperial AAA. The Imps are starting to put up a fight though and our teams are encountering stiff resistance around that jamming tower, so we will have to fight through them."

Buck studied the situation.

That jamming tower was located at the western corner of the armory, past Imperial defenses hastily being erected to defend it, and reinforcements _were_ on the way, no doubt about that.

They had to hit hard and very fast, in and outâ€¦the shock trooper way.

"Lets move!" Ludmilla shouted.

The ODS'Ts jumped off the roof, falling three stories and hitting the ground in a firing position, the synthetic carbon nanotube muscles in their legs flexing and absorbing the impact, making three story fall feel to Buck as if he was simply jumping off from the back of a Warthog.

The ODS'Ts quickly moved from their LZs to link up, putting down any resistance which was still disorganized on this side of the base, having been hit hard by the Scram Missile's payload, allowing the ODS'Ts to group together and begin their work.

Tattered remains of Imperial soldiers in their strange body suits, which his suit's sensors quietly examined for him, and one of the vehicle bays along with a walking mech had been turned into nothing more than scrap metal.

The other ODS'Ts appeared, moving amongst the buildings and quickly eliminating resistance with brief bursts of gunfire or an airburst grenade, and soon they had linked up and pressed the assault.

"Here we go!" Ludmilla roared as another F-99 managed to strafe the Imperial positions between them and their target hidden amongst the buildings of the armory, rockets and machine guns pouring out a solid

river of destruction and leaving a wave of smoke and debris that the ODS's VISR systems pierced through, outlining the enemies some fifty meters across a small open field in red.

"Like I need something to tell me they want to kill me."

The next five minutes would be the longest of Buck's entire life.

Buck took point, the ODS's running forward meeting the Imperials head on before they could recover from the drone strike.

A hundred troops in black power armor ran forward toward the smoking breach in the defensive line at nearly 15 miles an hour, firing micro missiles targeted at individual Imperials, grenades from their underslung launchers, and streams of slugs from industrial sounding MA6Bs and Gauss Battle Rifles.

Buck ran through the smoke, his targeting systems identifying an Imperial soldier 40 yards away from him spinning out from behind the cover of a low lying concrete wall.

Still running at full tilt Buck swept the targeting reticule on his HUD of the enemy soldier and let loose a short burst from his weapon. The 8mm stacked projectiles leapt from the three barrels of his MA6 at hypersonic speeds in an electro-thermally induced snarl, cutting down the Imperial, denting and deforming the man or woman's white armor before another slug tore through it, leaving a bloodied and ragged mess to collapse to the dirt.

Orange hot bullets and white hot plasma flew past each other as they found almost instantly hit their marks. Three more ODS's near Buck collapsed, their armor penetrated and melted as red blasts of energy tore through them as another simply had his arms blown off.

The man's cries of agony were cut short as two blasts of energy melted and blew open his helmet.

Downrange half a mile away one of the Imperials spinning around from behind a downed hover tank suddenly disintegrated from the torso up as a 10mm tungsten dart traveling at close to 3,000 meters per second passed through him delivered from a Stanchion Sniper Rifle.

"I've got you covered" the voice of the platoon's sniper, "Romeo", the Madrigali native whose crack shot with the Corps M2014 Gauss sniper rifle was unparalleled.

Another two Imperials soon met the same fate in hypersonic shrieks.

Buck kept running forward even as the most primitive parts of his brain screamed at him to get down, to dig the deepest hole he possibly could, and stay there.

The smoke from whatever the drone had hit kept covering the early dawn battlefield, and the infrared on his HUD came on, allowing him to keep moving through a hellish twilight of bloody carnage.

Three more Imps appeared to his right as he finally cleared the field and got in amongst the building, firing at him with precise

shots.

Before he could spin into cover a bolt struck him square in the chest.

Buck cried out as a flash of pain and heat burned at his chest, and he fell to the ground and tumbled, luckily avoiding another hit as he got up, his spinal implants giving him a dose of painkillers.

Warning lights and readings flashed across his HUD.

He had second degree burns on his chest under his armor and his Carbon Nanosuit in that area was hot. The outer armor of Titanium A and Depleted Uranium steamed as a fist sized blot of red hot armor plate sizzled and popped.

Shaking himself out of any reverie he spun back out of his momentary cover to find the Imperials engaging more of the ODSTs and sending streams of angry bolts of energy into the smoke.

They didn't realize that they hadn't killed him until it was far too late.

He fired on them, emptying his ammo strip and they burst into a shower of entrails and bloody fog.

"Come on, come on!" a voice yelled in his ear, almost uncomfortably loud.

Bullets snapped and cracked everywhere, their passage clear to him by the heat trails that showed vividly in the infrared.

Enormous volumes of fire saturated the faintest sign of enemy resistance.

The ODSTs crashed through the tattered Imperial lines, cutting enemy white armored soldiers down with deadly precise slugs from MA6s, Gauss Battle Rifles or shots from supporting snipers.

The Imperial lines began to crumble.

A micro-missile here to destroy a holed up enemy, an impromptu smart motor barrage courtesy of stacked grenade launchers there—the Imperial defenders began to crumble under the rivers of precise firepower and swift moving opponents.

However the Imperials didn't give up, and if anything put up an even stiffer and more professional resistance after realizing that staying put and relying on cover didn't work as well as it did against other opponents, and began blazing away at the ODSTs with streams of pulsating energy blasts while covering for one another's movement to a new and better position.

A crawling tactical withdrawal.

Half a dozen more ODST's fell quickly to the hellish fire of plasma and energy as Ludmilla screamed over the comm and her heart rate spiked even higher.

Spinning around and finding her after finishing a firefight with an Imperial trooper holed up behind a burnt out Warthog and another behind a low barricade (thanks to the last of his stock of Micro Missiles and the remainder of his third ammo strip), with the help of his HUD located Ludmilla.

She had taken a bolt to her right leg below the knee, burning through armor and synthetic muscle to incapacitate her.

Medical readouts showed that her suit had already deployed its Biofoam to stop any bleeding from the mangled leg, but more importantly that a group of Imperial soldiers were upon her.

Without hesitation Buck cursed, and bolted from his position over to hers, nearly getting shot again himself and forced to send a stream of fire an Imperial on the top floor of a barrack, forcing the man back into cover and chewing apart the position.

Smoke still billowed as a nearby fire consumed one of the buildings nearby while smoke enveloped Ludmilla's position, yet his VISR cut through the smoke effortlessly and highlighted the wounded ODS in yellow as he made it to her position.

"They got me." Ludmilla raggedly admitted as Buck stooped to pick her up.

"Behind you!" she shouted as two Imperial troopers charged through the smoke.

The interference from the Jammer had now reached a point where motion trackers were useless.

A bolt of energy caught Buck's left shoulder as he spun around to bring his rifle to bare.

Too slow.

Again his armor plate took the hit, and boiled and sizzled as he yelped in pain as his shoulder underneath burned, and the physical impact hit him like a prize fighter.

His MA6 clattered to the ground.

The Imperial kept charging, the smoking barrel of the enemy's weapon visibly charging for another shot to finish him off while the second trooper behind him and barely visible from ten meters away did the sameâ€|

So this was it?...

The second Imperial's head exploded into bloody confetti of meat, bone and brain matter, a vapor trail from a 10mm electro magnetically accelerated slug from a sniper going through the space once inhabited by a man's skull.

"That's ten." Romeo's voice came in over the comms.

The first Imperial hesitated and was distracted for an instantâ€|.

The instant that Buck needed to tear across the three meter distance in a flash and sidestep a blindingly red burst of energy.

A power suited enhanced hand batted away the Imps weapon in a flash as the two collided, the larger mass of ODST Marine winning as Buck effortlessly threw the Imperial Trooper nearly three meters to the ground.

The Imp however skillfully rolled back onto his feet in a fluid motion, loosing his helmet in the process, and ejected a nearly foot long deadly looking vibro blade from his right arm.

Buck barely had time to take in the tanned man's complexion as the man charged, roaring a guttural scream and charged towards him.

Normally in a situation such as this any Marine or ODST, or even UNSC Army Trooper had been trained to simply retrieve their weapon, but he didn't had time.

His attacker was crazed.

Eyes rolled back in his head, frothing at the mouth, tendrils of ragged flesh and old dried up blood decorating the spike on his arm.

Buck instead turned his hips, taking himself out of the line of attack, for a vibro blade could damage his nano suit underneath his armor plates; he simultaneously parried the thrust with his left arm, ignore the cries of protest from his burned shoulder beneath his armor.

Without thought, without aim, he snapped out a side kick , driving his armored boot into and through the most vulnerable point with all of the force he could muster, pivoting on the other leg to deliver extra torque.

The Imperial's knee cap.

Even through the white-washed armor plates, the enhanced strength of the ODST insured that Buck was able to bore right through it as armor plates bent and buckled.

He heard the joint dislocate with a sickeningly wet crunch.

The man dropped, screaming, until Buck's armored fist smashed into the bridge of his nose with such force that it destroyed the sinus cavity and caved in the frontal lobes.

The man was dead before he had fallen all the way to the ground.

Buck immediately moved and retrieved his weapon, and helped insure that Ludmilla was secure.

She wasn't.

A throbbing pulse of plasma from three Imperials stitched the ground around the ODST as Buck spun and returned fire.

His enemies were sixty yards away moving amongst the nearby ruins of a building, able to hit him now thanks to their own likely vision enhancers and that the dawn sun was dissipating the smoke that had hidden him.

Crimson bolts cut through the smoke as hypersonic 8mm slugs travelling at 1800 meters per second displaced air.

Another near miss dazzled Buck as he sidestepped, firing again in a long burst and settling his targets within his reticule.

One of them had their heads burst open, as the other's chest cavity was suddenly exposed to the outside world, fist sized holes nearly cutting the bloody man in two.

The ODS'Ts were now amongst the buildings now, clearing them out in close quarters combat with grenades, micro missiles or by simply firing through the buildings with X-Ray targeting and micro drones.

Dutch's voice came through on the comms, "Take that fucker down!"

An Imperial Mech, having survived the missile strike, was firing deadly blasts from chin mounted cannons, rounded a corner, spitting fire at a duo of ODS'Ts who attempted to take out its leg joints with their micro missiles.

They were only partially successful, managing to slow it down and visibly damage the mech, but were simply vaporized as the Imperial walker turned its weapons on them.

The mech was making its way towards his position.

Shit!

Buck ran to scoop up Ludmilla, who groaned in the process as Buck began to pump his legs and sprinted away from the walker, whose weapons were turning to face him.

"Warning. Vehicular Threat detected." His threat detector and CI spoke to him needlessly.

"Incoming!" Mickey shouted on the Comms as Buck ducked just in time for an 102mm anti tank missile from an ODS'T support specialists M-41 Dual Heavy Missile launcher streaked over his head and tore across the concrete tarmac towards the Imperial Mech in a flash.

The fusion based shaped charge vaporized half of the head of the Walker, as secondary explosions sent it crashing to the ground.

"Thank you." Buck half chuckled as he got to a safe position and set Ludmilla down.

One of the four Medics who had jumped in with the ODS'Ts ran to tend to her wounds, as Buck took stock of the situation.

It didn't take long however for him to notice that his radar, motion, and long range comms systems were back up, and Dutch's enthusiastic cursing over the comms gave him all the information he needed.

The jammer was down.

They could see now.

Information streamed in from the drones and the Big Eyes, giving him every bit of detail about the area, the position of his enemies, and friendly forces.

The jammer at the space port had been taken out by the initial missile strikes, but Imperial reinforcements were soon moving it to sweep the ODSs there out.

Their casualties were running at the 50 percent range.

The assault on the Utgard Reactor Complex had gone well, and his own assault had taken down the Imperial anti air units and the jammers, but out of the three hundred ODSs that had landed, a third of them were gone.

However the Imperials were in full retreat, for nowâ€¦..

The Comms of every ODS came to life.

It was General Kitts.

"Good job boysâ€¦.but we are prioritizing getting our ODSs out of the spaceport, that mission is FUBAR. You will need to hold out as long as you can until we can pull you out or our armored forces link up with you."

Ludmilla and the higher ranking ODSs continued talking to the General as Buck looked at the sensorsâ€¦.

The Imperials were swarming out from their shield dome, and their Drones were starting to drop like flies. The Wombats were nearly all depleted, as were the Imperial fighter ranks, leaving the air to be controlled by who brought in the most anti-air units.

And a large advanced force of Imperials were moving their wayâ€¦.

They had to hold out long enough to be exfiltrated as the UNSC ground assault reached full steamâ€¦

And they had minutes to prepare.

Imperial Command Center****

Ivani slammed her hand on the holotable, cracking it as she all but screamed.

"Launch the 112th and our AT-ATs now!"

Her subordinates didn't hesitate as projections of her forces meeting the UNSC armored advance from both directions.

The UNSC air assault had been blunted, but her jammers were gone, taken out by UNSC soldiers flying in and jumping from space.

She took stock of the situationâ€|they wouldn't last long against her forces moving to reestablish the front.

Had they came in on a suicide mission?

If so she had an even more newfound respect for her opponents, but somehow she doubted that they were not planning to exfilâ€|

But either way it would matterâ€|.

They would all soon be overrun.

**PLEASE REVIEW! I LIKE FEEDBACK**

End
file.